

My week on the Border at McAllen, TX

August 12, 2014

I spent last week with some of my sister deacons from the Diocese of Texas, and two lay volunteers, in McAllen, enjoying the hospitality of St. John's Episcopal Church and their rector, Jim Nelson. We volunteered at the Catholic Charities site at Sacred Heart, and at the Food Bank of the Rio Grande Valley at Pharr. The many refugees that had been streaming through had decreased. We did not do some of the work we expected to do, and we did other work that was just as important in both of those places.

We met Sr. Norma, the Director of the Catholic Charities site in McAllen, and listened carefully to her advice and assessments on the situation that week. We saw the pallets and pallets of goods that are stored at the Food Bank, from caring hearts all over the country. Sr. Norma advised that gifts of goods such as clothes and shoes and hygiene bags, etc. should cease for now. The enormous stores they have will be shared with other facilities as the needs arise. Gifts of cash to Catholic Charities are still very useful.

It seemed to me that it would be very helpful to become aware of detention facilities around the US and offer aid on site at those facilities. We can be aware of international fostering regulations and seek opportunities to aid in that way, as well as encouraging free legal counsel for the refugees, all of whom will need that.

As we worked, we prayed for all involved in the relief operations, and we prayed as well for humane treatments and for the difficult work the Border Patrol is engaged in. This will be an on-going effort. It is difficult to know all aspects of the situation at the present time.

We talked to many Border patrol agents and state troopers in our days there, as we handed out cookies we had baked. We saw tears in the eyes of a few, who are not accustomed to warmth and kind listening.

We saw amazing work being done in the colonia of Penitas, TX, on the Border, by a group of missionary nuns with hearts of love and great talents to organize a wonderful community center offering tutoring, sewing classes, and a fine clinic for the documented and undocumented residents of the colonia.

I am spending some quiet time this week processing all I saw and experienced, and continuing to try to stay up to date with changing events. I am grateful to all who are the hands and feet of our Lord Jesus on the Border of Texas and Mexico, and to the far corners of our country where refugees have gone to join families. Let us continue to pray for traveling mercy for all people who undertake perilous journeys seeking freedom from danger in their home countries around this troubled world. And, as my sister deacon Pat Ritchie reminds us, let us also pray for the many souls who have lost their lives on the trip to El Norte, and are largely forgotten. Lord, have mercy.

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