



“We are making the body of Christ with our presence with the migrants.”

by Lisandra Pedraza Burgos, IHM and Ann Oestreich, IHM
(Members of Monroe IHM Leadership Team)

“I am joyful and grateful. At McAllen, I found what God wanted from me. We are making the body of Christ with our presence with the migrants.” With these words, Carmen Armenta Lara, one of our sisters at this OSP – IHM Ministry at the Border, described her profound experience. Before this ministry, she wondered if God had exploded and dissipated into millions of particles that impeded her finding Him/Her. It was in the context of encounters with the migrants that Carmen realized that all the particles interrelate, interconnect, and become one. It was in the faces of the migrants that she recognized the face of God, of the God of Love that called her to serve.

After briefly sharing the life and ministry of this community, we understand, somehow, the deep meaning of Carmen’s metaphor. The encounter with the families that come from Venezuela, Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Cuba, offers opportunities to see with new eyes, to feel with a new heart, and to demystify the *other*, that has been constructed. Constructing “the other” is an ancient, powerful strategy to categorize people, induce fear by demonizing them, undermine their credibility and access to basic human rights, and share power in society. When we look into their eyes, affirm their humanity, and listen to their silences, stories, hopes, and dreams, our hearts are transformed.

By opening ourselves to heart encounters and relationships, we see each person who comes to the USA as a sister or a brother, created and loved by God. We see their suffering and understand that the decision to leave their home countries is influenced by complex circumstances that force them to take incredibly high risks that put their safety and lives in jeopardy, for the hope of a more fulfilling life.

To be part of the OSP – IHM Ministry at the Border, and volunteering at the Catholic Charities RGV Humanitarian Respite Center and the Casa del Migrante, in Reynosa, Mexico, has been a blessing. Like Carmen, we recognized the faces of God in the people who came there. The experience of encounters with these women, men, and children will live in our hearts forever. We are mindful that although their journeys include great danger, uncertainties, and fears, they cling to their deep faith in God and the kindness of others.

We continue to value the prophetic presence of our OSP/IHM community with the most marginalized and excluded and to reflect on its impact on the present and future of religious life. We experienced the power of hope over despair, love over hate, and peace over all types of violence. Thank you, McAllen community, for your gifts and for being an inspiration for the thousands of migrants you have touched, as well as for our congregations, and the global community. May you, and all of us in religious life, continue walking with God's people, and loving them as God loves them. After all, this is the essence of our call: to let the World know that each and all are loved unconditionally.



Sisters Rose Patrice Kuhn, Lisandra Burgos, Carmen Armenta Lara, Ann Oestreich, and Mary Elaine Anderson at the Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen, TX.