



A COLLABORATION OF CARE - IMMIGRANT ACCOMPANIMENT AT THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

Melanie Menkevich and Catherine E. Wilson

Between June 1-6, 2025, the Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters in McAllen, Texas, graciously hosted us to more fully understand the challenges faced by immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border as well as the multilayered response by a range of nonprofits providing respite, services, and accompaniment to those facing an uncertain future. The best way to describe what we observed firsthand in the Rio Grande Valley and Reynosa, Mexico, was a collaborative nonprofit network of care and concern. Given that immigration is a dynamic and complex issue which touches every dimension of the human person, it was only fitting that we witnessed a loving outreach among a variety of religious orders, such as the IHM sisters, the Jesuits, the Sisters of Mercy, and the Daughters of Charity, as they meet immigrants exactly where they are – amid their challenges and dreams for a better life.

This collaboration of care takes shape in various ways – from providing opportunities for worship, to designing workshops in art and dance therapy to developing activities to help pass the time, strengthen community ties, and build lasting memories. We played *Lotteria* with families, kicked around a soccer ball with young siblings, and sang songs in Spanish. We learned the dedication to mastering a new skill of weaving artistic and colorful patterns in plastic, in order to teach it to the women and children.

In border cities like Reynosa, other non-governmental organizations like Save the Children, the United Nations, and Doctors Without Borders further extend this collaborative network by offering educational support for immigrant children and medical assistance for all immigrants in their respective situations. There was also collaboration amongst the migrants in waiting – people from different countries passing the time together, sharing childcare duties, offering support and solace, and joining together in prayer. Our time spent there was bittersweet; it was a beautiful experience to witness the collaborative spirit of care, both amongst religious workers and migrants, while simultaneously heartbreaking to realize the uncertainty that the migrants are facing.



Catherine and Melanie with Honduran migrants in Senda 1, Reynosa, Mexico.

Volunteering at this border mission embodied the true spirit of reciprocity; we'll never forget the impressions that these people made on us. It brings a new perspective to the work being done at the IHM Center for Literacy, as many of our students have made a similar journey and arrived at their destination, only to now be filled with the same uncertainty that they're facing at the border. Before going to the border, we were told how different it would be after being closed, with fewer people passing through; however, there is still work to be done for migrants who need a hopeful presence on both sides of the border and beyond.



Catherine and Melanie with the Missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters.

Looking back on our visit, it was fitting that our visit to the U.S.-Mexico border took place at the start of Immigrant Heritage Month, a month in June dedicated to celebrating the many contributions that immigrants have made in the United States. We are grateful to the IHM sisters for their generous hospitality in McAllen, Texas, as well as for their heartfelt dedication to immigrant accompaniment. Their work, as part of this larger nonprofit network at the border, allows the American public to recognize and advocate for the challenges faced and contributions made by immigrant communities in our midst.

Melanie Menkevich, MPA, is Executive Director of the IHM Center for Literacy in Northeast Philadelphia, and Dr. Catherine Wilson is Associate Professor of Public Administration at Villanova University.