



June Update from the OSP-IHM Border Mission

Too Much to Bear

By Sister Joyce C. Bell, IHM Social Justice Coordinator, Malvern

Social Justice is gospel living through actions that embody the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. As I crossed the border from Reynosa, Mexico to McAllen, Texas, I was struck by the number of migrant families camped along the bridge that crosses the Rio Grande, a thin strand of humanity clinging to the hope that they will be received as asylees into our country. Who were they? Why were they there? How long had they been there? Weather every day in McAllen in late April was overcast, humid, and in the 90's. It was not the kind of weather you wanted to be standing or sitting in for a long period of time. Mothers and fathers, small children and infants



View of the Rio Grande River from the Hidalgo International Bridge

were all there. Even the sisters who serve in McAllen had no explanation, only conjectures, as to why these people had gathered and were waiting for who knows how long. Meanwhile, the queue of people who were crossing the border stopped and started but eventually reached the American side. Sister Lauretta Linsalata and I were volunteering at our collaborative ministry, Mary Comfort of Migrants, in McAllen. In our eleven-day ministry here, we met hundreds of people waiting, hoping. They were gracious and cared for but the burning question in my mind was, "How did we ever come to this?"

In 1980, the United States Congress created the Refugee Act. It has formed the basis for asylum in our country. Asylum seekers must be in the U.S. or at a port of entry to request the opportunity to apply for asylum.

Since 2016, the U.S. Government has severely restricted access to asylum at the border. The "Remain in Mexico Policy" impacted more than 75,000 asylum seekers. Title 42 sent nearly three million migrants back to Mexico. At the end of Title 42, May 11, 2023, President Biden implemented the "Asylum Ban" on May 12, 2023. This ban requires migrants to seek asylum first in whatever country they pass through on their way to the southern U.S. border. If they are denied, they may request it here. How would the migrants trekking through the jungles and the Darien Gap even know about this policy? If they make it to the border, they must secure a limited appointment time through an App on a smartphone called CBP One. This policy turns asylum protection into a lottery system, leaving the protection of vulnerable people to chance, while many remain in dangerous conditions. *



Sister Lauretta Linsalata waits on the bridge to cross into the US.

As a Catholic, it becomes difficult to justify everything I see when my faith believes in the dignity of the human person, the importance and protection of family life, the right to live in a society that promotes the common good and the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. One answer is to support the religious non-profits that are providing the basic necessities to the migrants while they wait for a more just and humane policy. A second answer is to become a voice for the voiceless, to advocate for changes in immigration policies that align more consistently with the best of who we are as Americans and with our beliefs as Catholics.



Sister Joyce Bell, Sister Laretta Linsalata, and Sister Rose Patrice Kuhn among migrant tents in Senda 2.

***The International Rescue Committee is the source of all factual information.**

https://www.rescue.org/article/it-legal-cross-us-border-seek-asylum?ms=gg_ppc_fy24_articles_mmus_oct&initialms=gg_ppc_fy24_articles_mmus_oct&utm_campaign=fy24_articles&gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjwo6GyBhBwEiwAzQTmcIr7jF5gFW-Oi-d7AELhb86d09Xk_kE_nKXYTIBdG0YWB1hUIYxlhoCd8UQAvD_BwE