



## Solidarity and Community with Migrants on the US-Mexico Border

by Mary Elaine Anderson, IHM

In our September communication, we explained the impact that the January 20<sup>th</sup> and recent immigration legislation has had on our OSP-IHM collaborative ministry at the border. Although we continue to minister in a variety of ways to migrants on both sides of the US-Mexico border, **what has changed drastically in the last eight months is the number of migrants we are serving.** With no way and no hope of crossing the border legally, migrants waiting in shelters and encampments in Reynosa, Mexico, are fewer. Shelters in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas have also seen a reduction in migrants who have recently crossed the border, and organizations, like Catholic Charities and La Posada Providencia, have adapted their services to respond to the needs of economically poor immigrants who are currently living in the area.

The diminishment of migrants not only has affected where we IHMs minister but also **HOW** we serve our brothers and sisters. Because of the smaller number, we can spend quality time with individuals, couples, and families who are among the most vulnerable in our society today. We are building trust and a sense of community among migrants who are unable to return to their countries of origin and have been left behind on the Mexican side of the border. We are also addressing the deeper needs—spiritual and emotional—of our migrant brothers and sisters in Texas who are living in fear of deportation.



I have been offering mental health workshops to groups of women and men at Casa del Migrante, Reynosa, Mexico, and at La Posada, San Benito, Texas. ***Finding your Emotional Balance*** is a series of six sessions that addresses issues, such as anxiety and depression, and promotes solidarity and community building. Through art, movement, and conversation, participants learn to center and ground themselves, recognize and identify ways to satisfy their personal needs, set boundaries, and discover and value their own unique gifts and talents.

**Sister Mary Elaine with migrant women at Casa del Migrante. Their clay art represents their rootedness and the source of their strength.**

In Casa del Migrante, Rose attends to the children of the workshop participants and provides an array of art activities and games that children of all ages enjoy. During the summer, there were often about 30 children ranging from 2 to 13, some whose first language was Spanish, while others spoke only Haitian Creole. In La Posada, both Carmen and Rose participated in the workshop with the adults. Their sharing about themselves and their life experiences helps the men and women to trust and also speak from their hearts about their feelings, needs, and desires.



**Sister Carmen and Elizabeth, a migrant woman in the Rio Grande Valley, show their artwork, a Circle of Six Types of Needs.**

Recently, a volunteer and I have begun giving parenting education classes to women at Casa del Migrante. Language has been a challenge since some of the women speak Spanish and others Haitian Creole. However, the women are interested and grateful, and they tolerate the difficulties we have with the Creole language.



Rose, Carmen, and I have been blessed and give thanks for the women, men, and children who have opened their hearts to us. Together we have formed a community that embraces diverse cultures and languages and that recognizes the uniqueness and preciousness of all God's children.

**Sister Rose with the children at Casa del Migrante, Reynosa, México.**