

From the Rev. Paula Sanders

The Rev. Paula Sanders called to ministry of radical hospitality

Friends and Colleagues,

God is doing a new thing!

Early this year, I began to feel God's call to a new ministry of radical hospitality. Radical hospitality is an old concept. It means to provide for the stranger from our very best, as if sojourners were family. This outpouring of love is required of us as Christians because God's chosen people were rescued from slavery in Egypt. Radical hospitality has always been a cornerstone of my ministry.

Because of this, I became increasingly outraged by the atrocities being visited upon God's children at the border between Mexico and the United States. I immersed myself in reading about issues faced by those seeking asylum from violence and poverty in their Central American home countries. I also studied the punitive and arbitrary application of federal immigration laws. During this time of prayer and study, it occurred to me that there was nothing preventing me from personally extending radical hospitality to people seeking refuge at our southern border. I began to search for an organization who might be able to use my unique gifts and experience.



The Rev. Paula Sanders and Joyce Hamilton, one of the original eight founding members of The Angry Tias and Abuelas of the Rio Grande Valley and elder at Treasure Hills Presbyterian Church, Harlingen, Texas.

It didn't take long. The Holy Spirit (in the form of Facebook) brought the perfect group to my attention. This brave collective of women have named themselves [The Angry Tias \(Aunties\) and Abuelas \(Grandmothers\) of the Rio Grande Valley](#).

The Angry Tias and Abuelas' mission is to advocate for dignity and justice for individuals and families seeking asylum at U.S. borders. As refugees embark on their journeys to destinations across the U.S., the aim of The Angry Tias and Abuelas is to assure that travelers' basic health and safety needs are met. In partnership with many other organizations, The Angry Tias and Abuelas provide emergency assistance such as food, water, clothing, toiletries, logistical support and cash funds when needed to those recently released from ICE custody at bus depots or shelters in Brownsville, Harlingen and McAllen, TX. The eight core women and their squadron of volunteers inform asylum seekers of their rights as they await entry across international bridges and give direct financial support to refugee shelters in the Rio Grande Valley and select immigrant shelters in Matamoros and Reynosa, Mexico.

In July, I traveled to Texas to volunteer with the group for four life-changing days. One of the Abuelas who offered lodging is a Presbyterian ruling elder – Joyce Hamilton of Treasure Hills Presbyterian Church in Harlingen, TX. I met several asylum seekers who were not hardened criminals, but only parents desperate for a chance to provide a better life for their children. I heard stories of abuse suffered by people of all ages in U.S. detention facilities that made my blood boil. My mind was made up.

After forty years in the Twin Cities area, I will be moving in September to the Rio Grande Valley to support the work of The Angry Tias and Abuelas in any way that I can.

What began as a private decision has blossomed into a very public community mission. Several churches and organizations, including Presbyterian Women, have agreed to partner in this expression of God's radical hospitality. Many individuals are showing support through a [GoFundMe account](#). Funds raised are helping with relocation expenses and purchasing supplies for ministry on the ground in Texas. As soon as I am situated, I will set up a blog/vlog to share the work of the Holy Spirit in the Rio Grande Valley.

Most of all, I welcome prayer support for this new direction. The first year

may be especially challenging as I adjust to the heat, activity level and working towards Spanish fluency. I am not Superwoman but whatever comes my way, I know that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

(Tax deductible donations can also be sent by check to Peace Presbyterian Church, 7624 Cedar Lake Rd, St Louis Park, MN 55426, St. Louis Park. Please write “Border Ministry” on the check’s memo line.)