

## **Strangers No Longer Uses Contributions to Aid Immigrant Families in Crisis**

Over the past 18 months, individuals, parishes, women's religious congregations have donated \$67,787 through SNL and the Jesuit Community at UDM that has been given to immigrant families in crisis, most of it through Parish Circles of Support who then can more adequately respond to families suffering from job-loss and deportations of a breadwinner, or families with a single mom and children who cannot make last month's rent or pay the electric bill.

Of course, some SNL members contribute through their parishes which help families in crisis – e.g. Gesu and Nativity/St. Charles Borromeo with particular families and St. Mary Student Parish in Ann Arbor (\$80,000 in gift cards). The Circle of Support at Our Mother of Perpetual Help Parish (Ferndale/Oak Park) raised over \$15,600 for the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts and their migrant shelter in Hidalgo, Mexico.

## **Who will decide how your donation will be used?**

**Strangers No Longer Accompaniment Task Force** meets every 3 weeks to discuss their individual work in Circles with immigrant families, and make decisions about disbursing funds for families in crisis. The members are:

- Amelia Mata, Ste. Anne, Detroit
- Amy Ketner, St. Mary Student (Jesuit) Parish, Ann Arbor
- Guadalupe Guzman, St. Damian of Molokai, Pontiac
- Marie Schimelfening, Chair – Ss. Peter and Paul (Jesuit), Detroit
- Rosemary Insley, Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Ferndale/Oak Park
- Sr. Martha de la Torre SMR, SNL Staff, *Mujeres Bajo la Proteccion de Dios*
- Sr. Nina Rodriguez CSJ, Ste. Anne, Detroit
- Sr. Rebecca Vonderhaar IHM, Christ the Good Shepherd, Lincoln Park
- Sr. Valerie Knoche IHM, Agape Center, St. Clement, Romeo

## **How were previous contributions used?**

### **Sr. Martha de la Torre, Sister of Mary Reparatrix – *Mujeres Bajo la Proteccion de Dios***

“If there are any grocery items left over, could you share them with me and my wife and 2 children? There is no work right now during COVID for me, and my wife only gets a couple hours a week cleaning houses. We have so little food.”

That is what a dad said to his sister who is a member of “*Mujeres Bajo la Proteccion de Dios*” or “*Women Under God's Protection.*” This new Circle of Support in Washtenaw County had just received 12 boxes of groceries and gift cards for the immigrant women of the Circle – and a member's brother was desperate.

Meanwhile, the women of the group soon realized that, in addition to the brother and his wife and kids, there was another family living in the same small apartment -- a single mom and her two toddlers. Both moms were only able to find just a few hours of house-cleaning work a week.

The *Mujeres* Circle got busy looking for help for the families, and the SNL Accompaniment Task Force covered part of their rent; other friends in other SNL Circles pitched in with additional

donations. In the end, the two moms asked to be part of “*Mujeres Bajo la Proteccion de Dios.*” They had experienced concrete solidarity from the *Mujeres* and other SNL Circles. Now they are participating in the emotional and spiritual solidarity of the *Mujeres* Circle, reflecting on the Holy Family as an immigrant family. That has helped all the women to value their RESILIENCE. Joseph and Mary were resilient – and to think of Mary as a resilient woman has been very encouraging to the women of the *Mujeres* Circle.

**Amy Ketner, Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry, St. Mary Student (Jesuit) Parish in Ann Arbor**

We have been supporting 60 immigrant families with gift cards (approx. \$80,000 in 2020), several support letters to ICE or the immigration judges, accompaniment to court or from jail, virtual ESL classes (English as Second Language), and connection to resources.

Strangers No Longer, from member donations, has helped us with over \$9000 for rent and energy bills. About 10% of families we support are moms whose husbands have been deported, leaving the family isolated. The kids and moms face mental health challenges from the trauma, leading some to seek therapy for themselves and their kids. Access to this health care is very limited due to insurance and language barriers. Some moms have to seek extra jobs, as they are now the only income, while the kids have to school from home. Many are unable to find any work because restaurants are shut down.

It is a pattern we see often: moms are suffering, juggling many stressors, and are anxious for their kids and deported husbands. Typically, the moms themselves are in court process for deportation, worrying about the unknown – what will happen to them in court in a year or two, and what about their kids who were born here (or who hold DACA status). At St Mary, a majority of these parishioners came here as young adults, and have been here for 15-20 years. They are an integral part of our community, and this is the only life they’ve known for decades.

**Amelia Mata, St. Anne de Detroit Circle of Support**

Our Circle of Support has been working with the Martinez family close to a year. Alejandro (spouse), who was the bread winner, was detained by ICE in late March of 2020. The Martinez family were close to being homeless because of a past due balance on their home’s land contract. After numerous attempts with different organizations, we were finally able to get them help to prevent their eviction.

Within the last 8 months, the family was struggling to pay for utilities and put food on the table. The Saint Anne's Circle of Support helped them pay for their utilities, groceries and other necessities, thanks to the generosity of all the donations given to Strangers No Longer.

The Martinez family were blessed with the release of Alejandro 3 weeks ago due to COVID and other medical reasons. Also, this past Monday (12-28-20), the United Community Housing Coalition paid their defaulted land contract debt of \$24,000 in full and allowed them to pay the loan back within 2 years with a 0% interest. The Martinez are happy and grateful that they can start the New Year in their family home.