

Tucson's Catholic Community Services Monastery Migrant Shelter Update

Dear Friends

Every week since my last update I have meant to write another, but each week the big picture of what we do and with whom changes. In the past month the shelter went from 200+ guests to 500, then back down, with a few with what we now call "slow days" of 50-60 new guests. Then just as suddenly occupancy surged by over 150 guests per day. In addition to those guests that ICE drops off at the Monastery, Border Patrol now has added to our numbers, dropping of families earlier and later than usual, and with less documentation and detail. These cycles of rapid expansion followed by sudden drops in the numbers of families seemed daunting at first, but as one kitchen volunteer exclaimed on a particularly busy day, "Let them come! We can handle anything."

Well, almost. Our eighty-year old building groans under the weight of so many guests. Water that rises on the second floor cascades through the ceiling of the first. Electric malfunctions led to the shutting down of critical equipment. We had to empty the shelter for twenty-four hours to do some electrical and plumbing repairs. Perhaps the old building heaved a sigh of relief to get a respite from the wear and tear on old pipes and electrical circuits, just as we appreciated the brief break.

Our work together, yours with us, has taken on graver tones as the political rhetoric over an emergency at the border continues to simmer. Yes, there is a crisis at the border, a human-rights crisis, a moral crisis, a hemorrhage of human potential from the south to the north, the suffering of families. This week as our late night drivers accompanied guests to the bus station, they found sixteen stranded parents with children who had been put on the bus in Phoenix, and who, upon arriving at the Tucson station to change buses, found that their next bus had been canceled. Without food, water, or any money, they were told they had to wait for the next opportunity to leave – the next day or the next. Our dedicated drivers gathered them up and brought them to the Monastery shelter where they bathed, slept, and arranged for drivers for their next leg of the journey. Another family of five from El Salvador arrived yesterday with a baby born in detention. Their sponsor could not manage a family of five or pay for their tickets. They were stranded and alone, until a volunteer began networking with her home church to sponsor the family.

As I write, two of our children and one adult had to be hospitalized after the latest surge and resulting Mexican crackdowns on safer routes through Mexico meant that families were forced to once again make the perilous trip on the top or sides of trains and other dangerous routes. We were able to get immediate medical attention for these three and someone is always with them in the hospital.

Some of our stories have happy endings while others do not. Director, Teresa Cavandish tells of the first time she saw the father who lost a leg below the knee and arm below the elbow when he became dizzy and fell from the top of a train, being wheeled into the monastery with his incredibly traumatized son. She described their meeting, "They were exhausted and broken, and the dad now has a post amputation infection and is back in the hospital." "I will never ever be the same after seeing this," she said.

Horrified at human cruelty and the suffering it causes, we are also encouraged and inspired by our comings together. We will never ever be the same. Truly, it is something of a miracle that people do make it through to their sponsors. Our super power in the midst of chaos is our volunteers, who step in at all times of the day and night to figure out the next right step in complicated situations. Physicians, ministers, scientists, teachers, call center operators, home-makers, artists, students, interpreters, computer experts, cooks, drivers . . . people from all walks of life come together because, as we tell our new guests, "We believe that a better world is possible."

As I arrived one morning one very young dad was sitting in the courtyard, sobbing into his hands. I sat down next to him as asked what was wrong. His crying intensified as he shook his head "no." I went to the kitchen and got a cookie and took it back to him. Sitting beside him, breaking the cookie, I said the words of my faith tradition, "This is my body . . ." He began to talk, punctuated by more tears. His sponsor couldn't afford the bus tickets for he and his son. He said they would die if they were returned to Guatemala. I told him that there are so many of you who care what happens to him. I learned there is a donor who will pay for people who can't afford their tickets. As he held so tightly on to me he wept and said, "I never imagined that there would be such good and kind people . . ." Miracle or simply connecting those who can help with those who need it? That is what we do best.

Our guests' suffering is not over once they reach us. This is the sharp edge to what we do. We cannot fix the situations that our guests face, but we will move heaven and earth to accompany them faithfully, generously, kindly, and with dignity. We can love them up and send them off to you, where you will do your best to help them take their next right step.

Thank you for your generous support, for your prayers, monetary and in-kind donations, and for sharing the good news our shelter is for our volunteers, guests, and larger community. Please feel free to share this letter with others who might be interested in learning more about our important work, and/or who would also like to offer financial support. Your support makes our work possible. Together, we provide help, create hope, and serve all. Your gift strengthens children, families, adults, and

communities. Donations can be made directly to CCS at <https://www.ccs-soaz.org/donate> or through our GoFundMe page <https://www.gofundme.com/casa-alitas-for-migrant-families>.

Peace on your way,

Rev. Delle McCormick
Monastery Shelter Volunteer