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September 30, 2021

Updates: In the week following this letter, the people waiting under the international bridge were evacuated. 10,000 of these individuals and families are now in transit to a different border city where their asylum requests will be processed. Diocesan Immigration & Refugee Ministries and the Frontera Collective – San Antonio Respite Center are in conversation with local city government to receive an unknown number of people each day, who will travel by bus to the respite center in San Antonio directly following their release. This agreement would require a dramatic increase in volunteer support and financial commitment for the respite center to meet the continuing need for humanitarian aid and hospitality, as we welcome our brothers and sisters in Christ.

September 23, 2021

“We give thanks to God always, remembering before our God and Father your faithful work and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

Dear Friends in Christ,

“It is overwhelming us, and we need help. But we keep doing what we can.”

That was the message on Monday, September 20th, from the Rev. Arnoldo Romero, rector at St. James’ Church, Del Rio.

Last week, up to 18,000 displaced Haitians began arriving at the U.S. and Mexico border, seeking asylum through the city of Del Rio, Texas. The sheer numbers overwhelmed federal immigration agencies’ ability to process asylum applications, and a great many Haitians are camped under the international bridge, in federal custody and awaiting either deportation or admission to the asylum process. The media images are heart-rending, and responses range from anger to sorrow to compassion to despair. Coming so soon after the plight of Afghan allies left behind during America’s final withdrawal from Afghanistan, the humanitarian crisis on our diocesan and international border feels like a tidal wave after a tornado.

While federal and state politicians point fingers and assign blame, the people of Del Rio responded. Citizens, local government, non-profits and churches are providing basic necessities for those in need. The



town of 35,000 is stretched to its limit, and yet they are doing what they are able to do. They are overwhelmed, but they keep reaching out to offer aid in Christ's name to men, women, and children seeking asylum. Our brothers and sisters need our help, and they need our prayers.

St. James' Episcopal Church, along with other congregations in the community, is supporting urgent relief efforts: volunteering at the [Val Verde Border Humanitarian Coalition](#) (VVBHC) county respite center, making meals, gathering clothes and hygiene products, assisting with translation, and helping coordinate transportation. The influx of federal and state law enforcement officers sent to Del Rio from throughout the country have stressed the town's resources, already challenged by nationwide supply chain delays, and restricted the business community's ability to feed and shelter them. Parishioners have opened homes and provided meals to these brothers and sisters, too.

Meanwhile, further inland, the [Frontera Collective - San Antonio Respite Center](#), co-sponsored by the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas and the Lutheran (ELCA) Southwestern Synod, is receiving Haitians released directly from Customs and Border Protection (CBP) after their asylum application have been processed and they are approved to travel in the U.S. to join family members or sponsors across the country. In this way, we are in communication with law enforcement agencies and relieving the immense pressure on respite centers and nonprofits serving migrants in Del Rio.

The crisis in Del Rio is expected to continue for two to three more weeks, and the VVBHC respite center needs volunteers on the border urgently. Likewise, the San Antonio Respite Center needs many more volunteers to welcome the rising numbers of Haitians, particularly volunteers who can speak Spanish. I encourage our churches, and those individuals who are able, to be generous with their time and money. Donations made to the diocesan Immigration Ministries, at dwtx.org/give, will help sustain our respite center in San Antonio and ministry partners in Del Rio, as needed. Information about volunteering in both communities is included at the end of this letter.

As we respond to this urgent need on our border, we cannot forget the displaced Afghans who risked all to be our allies in the long war in Afghanistan. Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM) is working closely with the State Department and other refugee agencies to support resettlement efforts. You can learn more about this work on their website, at episcopalmigrationministries.org.

As I have needed to say with unfortunate frequency during my tenure as bishop, we don't have the authority to solve the ongoing immigration issues that trouble our world. And our neighbors huddled under the bridge, or sent to guard the border, or living in that anxious town, don't have the luxury of time to wait for politicians to resolve policy debates that predate the 21st century. They are hungry, fearful, conflicted, and stressed *now*. They need help *now*.



We cannot do everything, but still we are not powerless. The power we *do* have is given by water and the Holy Spirit in baptism. It is the power to be God's children, to really see the person in front of us, and to follow Jesus into places of pain and brokenness. I commend to your prayers all those experiencing this sad situation. May we walk these roads together, seeking and serving Christ in all people and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Faithfully yours in Christ,



+David Reed

Bishop of West Texas

Immediate Support Needed for Diocesan Immigration & Refugee Ministries Responding to Displaced Haitians

- **[Donate online](#)** to support Immigration Ministries.
- **[Learn more](#)** about volunteering in San Antonio.
- **[Learn more](#)** about volunteering in Del Rio.
- **[Read "A Statement on the Situation in Del Rio,"](#)** from The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations.
- **[Attend "Neighbors Welcome: Update & Actions"](#)** on September 27, for an update from EMM on Afghan evacuations, arrivals, and ways to help.

Immigration & Refugee Ministries in the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas

Each day, individuals and families seeking asylum flee their home countries to escape violence, religious persecution, and war. In an effort to respond faithfully to the needs of our siblings-in-Christ, the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas established Immigration Ministries in 2019, to distribute factual information about the ongoing humanitarian needs at its southern border and to equip congregants with resources to welcome and embrace migrants in our communities.

Immigration & Refugee Ministries strives to share the realities of the migrant experience, to provide education around immigration laws and policies, to support partner organizations serving migrants in our communities, and to help individuals and Episcopal congregations walk in love as we endeavor to follow Christ and serve our neighbors.

Contact Flor Saldivar, Director for Immigration & Refugee Ministries, at immigration@dwtx.org, and read more online, at www.dwtx.org/immigration.

