



Mercy Mosaic

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Seeing God in the Face of Others

Watching asylum-seeking women crying and praying as they gather around the cross in the former chapel of Nazareth Shelter in El Paso, Texas, Sister LaVerne King, RSM, felt that she saw the face of God.

Using her Spanish-speaking skills, Sister LaVerne recently volunteered for 15 days at the shelter helping men, women and children seeking asylum who had just been released from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to reunite with their families in the United States.

Working with Spanish-speaking people in need is not new to Sister LaVerne who studied in Bolivia at the Maryknoll Institute and did mission work in Peru for seven years. She taught women skills and business development in Peru for six years. Now she serves as the principal of Christ the Teacher elementary school in Newark, Delaware, where there are some Spanish-speaking students and families.

At the shelter she met refugees from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico, Uganda and Uzbekistan. Guests at the shelter typically stay just one to three days, long enough to address their basic needs and connect with family or friends elsewhere in the United States.

Using her Spanish, Sister LaVerne welcomed guests to the shelter and helped them get bus tickets and connect with their families over the phone so they could reunite. She learned about the atrocities that made them leave their countries such as escaping drug cartels, violence, prostitution and domestic abuse. She also stood and prayed with people on the other side of the border through holes in the fence and visited Juarez, Mexico, to give sandwiches to hungry people in the plaza waiting to cross the border.

"They come to us with just the shirts on their backs scared to death," says Sister LaVerne. Their images remind her of photos from the Jewish concentration camps. "Once we reassure them we are not part of immigration but here to welcome and help them, we see their anxiety melt into relief that they have reached a safe place."

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School principal Sister LaVerne King, RSM, at Christ the Teacher in Newark, Delaware, tells her students about her experiences volunteering at the Mexican border helping women and children in need. (Photo by Steve Adams)

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Sister LaVerne King, RSM, shows a Spanish-speaking student photos of the refugee center in El Paso. (Photo by Steve Adams)

"We give them food, water, clean clothes and medical attention and reassurance. But their futures are bleak," says Sister LaVerne. "Only about 10% will receive amnesty; the other 90% will be deported or go into hiding. But we need to be like the Diocese of El Paso, where the shelter is located, and do everything necessary to welcome the stranger."

Prayer for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

*God, no one is stranger to you
And no one is ever far from your loving care.
In your kindness watch over migrants,
refugees and asylum seekers,
Those separated from their loved ones,
Those who are lost
And those who have been exiled
from their homes.
Bring them safely to the place
where they long to be,
And help us always to show your
kindness to strangers
And those in need.
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Who too was a refugee and migrant
Who travelled to another land
Searching for a home.*

Amen

(Source: Nouwen Network)