

WHO IS A MIGRANT?

by Cynthia Pendergrast, FDC Volunteer

September 24 was the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees. We marked the day here in Agua Prieta with a gathering at the Migrant Resource Center (MRC). Prayers were offered, the statement from Pope Francis marking the day was read, volunteers at the Migrant Resource Center spoke of some of their experiences and memories of exchanges with migrants, and a message was offered in which we were reminded how Abram and Sarai, key people in three faith traditions, rushed to welcome and offer hospitality to strangers they saw approaching.



Migrate: to go from one country, place, or locality to another. (Merriam-Webster.com)

Working with this definition, my entire family has migrated. Personally, I migrated from Iowa to Kansas to Texas to Tennessee to Kentucky to northwest Iowa to Virginia to southeast Iowa to Kentucky again to New York and now to Sonora, Mexico.

Each time I migrated I found community, people who welcomed me and helped me find my way in a new place. Sometimes people came immediately to offer me help in the new place. Sometimes people were open to my questions. Once someone turned the other way when they saw me in the grocery store. But in all those places I found a place and welcome.

In pondering the words from that night at the MRC, I ask myself: What is my response to the stranger? What are my thoughts, my actions, my words? Do I rush to welcome? Do I approach

hesitantly? Do I watch and observe? Do I call for help? What has helped me when I migrated to a new place? What actions did people take that have stuck with me years later?

With time, experience, and age I've come to understand that the person who turned the other way in the grocery store so many years ago was most likely afraid, not hostile – “Aack! The new minister's wife! What will I say?” I understand that those who most warmly welcomed me knew welcome themselves and wanted to include me in their community. It is a gift of grace, a blessing, to be welcomed. But it is equally a gift of grace and a blessing to be able to welcome another warmly.

My hope today is that each of us who make up this world can look within ourselves and find ways to reach toward others—strangers, friends, acquaintances—to offer welcome and hospitality.

If you are interested in reading Pope Francis' statement, it can be found here—

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/20230511-world-migrants-day-2023.html>