

It's About the Children

Las Familias Solidarity Journey to the Border on November 1, 2023

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Some moments at the Asylum Seeker shelters break our hearts. A group of anxious and exhausted asylum seeking families arrived at the shelter in a US Customs van. Once they were inside, welcomed and seated, the shelter manager, Elisa, asked everyone to take quiet moments to offer gratitude that their families were finally safe. “Estoy libre.” She had them shout afterwards. Louder! “Estoy libre!” the migrants shouted. Meaning, “I am free of the chains that tied me down.” Our team had the poignant honor of cutting off the many plastic bands that were secured around each asylum seeker’s wrist. The white band, like a hospital bracelet, contained each person’s bar code from processing at US Customs & Border Protection. Their multiple colored bands, secured during dangerous moments on the family’s journey to the border, were harder to decipher. According to published news reports, each different color of their bands may signify “this family has paid our gang to guide them through this section”, or “they have paid this cartel protection money to avoid extortion or kidnapping” or “the woman has already paid the toll for this route by being raped.” We were shocked to see that even the children and tiny babies had multiple bands around their ankles. “**Soy Libre!!**” the spontaneous cheer went up as each and every band was removed from every asylum seeker’s wrist or ankle. “Soy Libre”, meaning “I have freedom in my heart, my life. I am a person of freedom!”

We thought of the quote from the Book of Isaiah, later echoed by Jesus. “Let the oppressed go free, remove the chains that bind people.” As our team looked at each child and baby, we prayed that they may indeed find freedom and safety in our country.

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Bringing joy to the children always lifts our team’s hearts. Boxes of chocolate chip cookies, made by one of our volunteers, brought instant smiles to the many children of Guatemalan families that had just arrived at another Annunciation House shelter. These parents had sold everything, borrowed money and risked the harrowing 2,000 mile journey to the US for their children’s sake.

Guatemala is wracked by violent gang crimes of extortion, robbery and kidnapping. Murder rates are soaring, over 3x the US average. Hurricanes have wiped out crops, resulting in the 6th highest level of child malnutrition in the world. In the shelter filled with young families and children, we asked where the toys are. “We don’t have any,” the volunteer explained. “A child gets so attached to the toy that they play with here. We don’t have the heart to take it from them when they leave. So we have no toys left.” Our team vowed to make the holidays happier for these and other migrant children!

It's About the Children - Advocate

Unaccompanied children have traveled hundreds or even thousands of miles to the United States, often completely on their own, to escape extreme violence, sexual abuse, human trafficking, and other dangers. Once they have reached the United

States, these children must navigate the complex U.S. immigration system, including an immigration court system that was designed for adults.

The Immigration Court Efficiency and Children's Court Act of 2023 is commonsense, bipartisan and bicameral legislation that would help strengthen due process for unaccompanied children and alleviate the immigration court backlog. Please urge your members of Congress to pass this groundbreaking bill via the "Kids In Need of Defense" organization. Note: Letters can be sent without making a donation to KIND. [Tell Congress: Create a Children's Court \(supportkind.org\)](https://supportkind.org)

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It's About the Children - Donate

Can you help us bring Holiday Joy to the children who stay 2-5 days in the Annunciation House shelters, before their families go on to meet their sponsors? Our next trip to the Annunciation House Shelters on the Border is **Wednesday, December 6th. 100% of each donation that we receive goes directly to critically needed supplies for asylum seeking families.** Here's how you can send some care to the 250 asylum seekers that are welcomed and sheltered EVERY DAY in the 3 shelters that we will be meeting with in December.

- **Donate.** This allows us to buy in bulk, significantly lowering the price per item.
- **Venmo - @LasFamilias-Solidarity**
- **Send a check** - For a tax deduction, make check to St. Michaels and All Angels. In the memo line put "Las Familias Solidarity." Mail to St. Michaels & All Angels, 601 Montañó Rd. NW. ABQ, NM 87107 **or** make out & send to Liz Hanna, 2 San Juan Trail, Corrales, 87048
- **Online - Go to all-angels.com**. (St. Michael and All Angel's parish) Hit the yellow "Donate" button on the bottom of the web page. On the donations page, hit the arrow to the right of "Use this donation for." Scroll down to Las Familias Solidarity. Use PayPal or credit card to donate.
- **Shop & Send** - Bring items to St. Michael & All Angels Parish, 601 Montañó Rd. NW, ABQ. Monday-Friday to parish office or Sunday Morning to church. Deliver or ship to Sharon Palma, 2 Isleta Trail, Corrales, NM 87048. If you drop off, please text Sharon at 505.249.5046

Due to limited space in our SUV's and the shelters, please understand that **we can only accept these items** that the Annunciation House shelters have requested. **Please deliver all items by Sunday, December 3rd.**

- Coloring books and small boxes of crayons
- Long sleeve tops, and sweaters for boys & girls ages 2-12
- Warm jackets, hoodies for children age 2-12
- Warm knit children's hats, gloves or mittens
- Small new stuffed animals, safe for small children, beanie baby size
- Warm jackets and hoodies for men & women - small and medium

- Men and Women's new briefs - small, medium
- Bulk cough drops and small sizes of menthol rub, like vicks

Thank you for helping us to bring love, compassion and support these holidays to the asylum seeking families who have fled from such violence and poverty. If you support what we are doing, please share this newsletter with a friend. We cannot do our work without you!

With our gratitude,

Liz, Mike, Sharon, Denise, Linda

The Las Familias Solidarity Team

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