



| VIDES+USA Heartbeats | Newsletter | January 25, 2016 |

Meeting at the Margins

Courage on a journey fraught with many unknowns, questions, and unimaginable fear and hope



Greetings,

Nothing could have prepared us for the emotion we experienced even though the way was paved with plenty of work, prayer and sacrifice.

VIDES+USA followed the Spirit's guidance in arranging for FMA Sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) and young adult Volunteer Missioners to serve the local refugee teens. Refugees. "Why don't they solve their own problems in their own countries?" some may think. "Why flood our nation, already with enough challenges of our own?"

Consider the alternative: illiteracy, child labor/unemployment, dire poverty, violence, drug/human trafficking, gang ridden existence. Are not blessings received intended to be shared?

VIDES arrived at the holding facility for the undocumented teens in San Antonio, meeting the youth where they are at—a gated community. With background checks and TB tests in place, FMA and young adult Missioners engaged the receptive youth in evangelization, character building, crafts, singing, games, and fun

activities in their very own group homes. Soon we realized the ever present staff were captivated as well.

Boarding the bus with our camp wares, we pondered upon our encounter. What the news presents as statistics, we met as real persons with their own stories—faces with names—children of God like ourselves, sharing the same human condition of need for food, clothing, shelter, security, acceptance, love, dreams and a bright future.

Unaccompanied Minor Refugees

A great initiative of VIDES is the **Youth Refugee Prevention Program** which seeks to alleviate the migration crisis on multiple fronts starting at the root in Latin America.

[For the beginning of the project, see VIDES Heartbeats E-News: Undocumented, 8/2014]



On the US home front, we reach out in places in Laredo and San Antonio, Texas.

A team of FMA and VIDES volunteer-missioners share their service reflections as they serve a community of unaccompanied teens at their shelter here in San Antonio.

"I did not know their individual stories," one volunteer, **Lauren Schaller**, began, "but I could not stop thinking of the situations that might have driven them to leave their home country and the hardships and dangers they may have experienced on the way here."

"Education is a matter of the heart." **Liz Suarez** understood this well as she connected with a group of young girls at the shelter, teaching them Christian songs, Bible stories, and life lessons during this vulnerable transition period in their life. With so many uncertainties lying ahead in their future, any sort of comfort was welcoming for them.

As **Amanda Lozano** put it, "We hoped that during all of these moments they would be able to forget how far from home they were and all the difficulties they had been through."

The journey the youth took was as much emotional and spiritual as it was physical; through

hardships, fear, and the elements they traveled to arrive in the US holding on to that sliver of hope that propelled them to seek better living conditions in the first place.



Christian Ruehling wrote about the experience: *"We talked to them about Jesus Christ, incorporating games, skits, and crafts to introduce them to the theme that Jesus Christ loves us above all else. It was during the time spent with these kids that I also saw courage. They had courage to leave their families and hometowns to take the journey to the United States, a journey fraught with many unknowns, questions, and unimaginable fear and hope that they would reach their destination safely. It was then that I realized that no matter what we taught them, Jesus Christ was already in their hearts and had accompanied them on their journey."*

The youth that we worked with were varied. Some would stay for days before their papers were processed, others for years. Some had come from loving families, others from a life of gangs and drugs. Each walked a different path to come here and each had a story to tell. The least we could do for them is be present and bring Christ to them, **to meet them where they stood** at the margins.

Sofia Piecuch, expressed this eloquently, *"...humans are the holiest beings we can meet on earth (besides the blessed Sacrament) yet most human encounters are merely in passing. Therefore, mustn't every human interaction be unique, loving, and valuable even if it is just for one second, five days, or fifty years?"* Similarly, as Christ-bearers, every encounter is an opportunity to bring a testimony of confidence in the truth, devotion to religion and an expression of loving-kindness.

We cannot fix their situation nor can we even properly understand the context in which they came here - but we can be present.
In this Year of Mercy, we must look at our own lives to make a change.
Can **you** feed the homeless? Can **you** visit the sick?
Can **you** bring about a change to your community? To the world?
Change starts with the heart.
These young volunteers and FMA are taking the risk to make that change.



Pictured above (from left to right): Lauren Schaller, Liz Suarez, Sr. Theresa Jones, FMA, Sr. Ana Laura Palacios, FMA, Amanda Lozano, Christian Ruehling (back), Yaneli Vargas (front), Sofia Picuch, Russell Harpring (back) and Dorottya Csere (front).

Not Pictured: S Mary Gloria Mar, FMA, S Carmen Nieto, FMA, S Margaret Natal, FMA, S Anna Kim Nguyen, FMA, Mrs. Lourdes Morales



All the above were involved in the 2016-Winter Formation/Service Camp in San Antonio, TX

- (Front) S Anna Kim Nguyen FMA, Elizabeth Suarez, **Rev Charles Banks OMI**,
 Amanda Lozano, Dorottya Csere, S Carmen Nieto FMA
 (Middle) S Amanda Kern DC, Sofia Picuch, S M Gloria Mar FMA, (Fr) ----
 S Theresa Jones FMA, ----- S Martina Ponce FMA
 (Back) S Sydney Moss FMA, Christian Ruehling, Lauren Schaller, Russell Harpring,
S Patricia King FMA-Provincial, S Margaret Natal FMA,
 S Ana Laura Palacios FMA

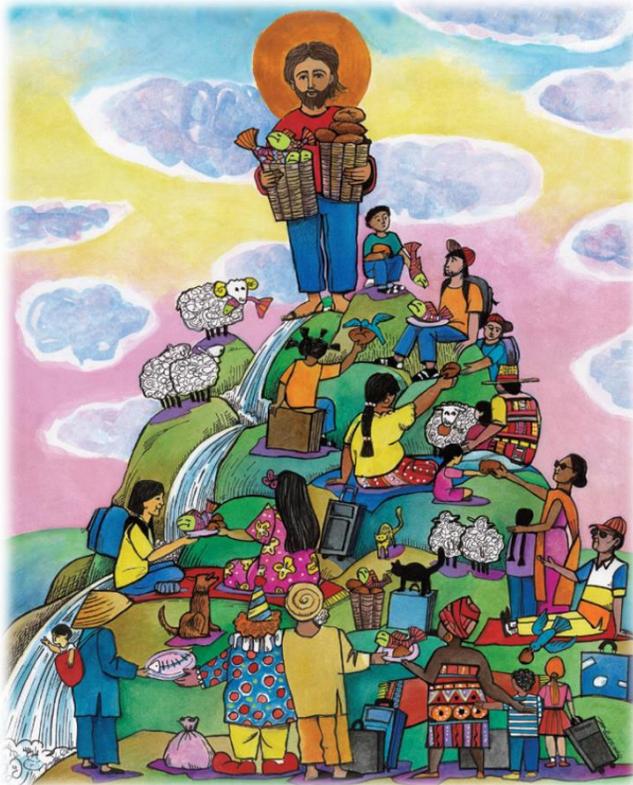
At the Source of Our Success

Every day 40 Sisters, including the elders of the FMA Provincial House in San Antonio, are deeply involved with the Migrants and Refugees. They offer their prayer and sacrifices for the fruitfulness of our service and for a different Province in our Institute as our Sisters, Collaborators, and young people accompany the migrants and refugees in their area.

Their prayer and support give VIDES+USA strong roots that uphold our missionary service.



A Prayer for Migrant Children



Loving Father,

in your infinite compassion,
we seek your divine protection for refugee children who
are often alone and afraid.

Provide solace to those who have been witnesses to
violence and destruction,
who have lost parents, family, friends, home, and all they
cherish due to war or persecution.

Comfort them in their sorrow, and bring help in their time
of need.

Show mercy to unaccompanied migrant children,
too, Lord.

Reunite them with their families and loved ones.

Guide those children who are strangers in a foreign land
to a place of peace and safety.

Comfort them in their sorrow, and bring help in their time
of need.

Show us how we might reach out to these precious and
vulnerable children.

Open our hearts to migrant and refugee children in need,
so that we might see in them your own migrant Son.

Give us courage to stand up in their defense against those
who would do them harm.

For this we pray through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives
and reigns with you

in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen.

Our Heartfelt GRATITUDE to All of Our Benefactors Who Have Made This Possible!
THANK YOU for being a part of VIDES+USA!
Together we are making an impact!

Others who would also like to be a part of VIDES,
please click below to see one way that you can do it.



or, mail a check to:

VIDES + USA

**6019 Buena Vista St.
San Antonio, TX 78237**

VIDES+USA Heartbeats E-News is published to share glimpses of faith and love in action with all who desire to make a difference in the world.

May God Bless You All!

S Mary Gloria Mar, FMA

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