



Religious of the Assumption in Chaparral (US)

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In other places and times migration could be more linked to environmental destruction, but today, here on the US/Mexican Border it is largely due to violence, drug cartels, corrupt security forces, impunity, extortion, kidnappings... For example, it is reported that 90% of the women and children who had crossed the border in the summer of 2014 and were being held in a detention center in Artesia, NM “passed” the credible fear interview. That is, these asylum seekers were afraid for their lives. This is very different from the immigrants whom we met in Chaparral 15 years ago who had mostly come for economic reasons and to give more educational opportunities to their children.

How we work with immigrants

One of the basic ways that we work with Immigrants is through personal accompaniment of persons and families in the concrete situation in which they find themselves. It takes the form of spiritual accompaniment (prayer, comfort, direction, visiting the sick) or material accompaniment (resource information, helping gain access to the resources, etc.). Over the years the immigrants (with or without documents) know that they can trust us to do what we can to find solutions with them to their problems.

Prison ministry : Sisters and lay leaders work to bring the Good News to the prisoners or detainees above all by sharing their own faith experience. All the ministers feel the missionary call to bring the hope, healing and joy found in God’s Word and Sacraments. (Pope Francis’ understanding of the New Evangelization in his recent Apostolic Exhortation) The lay ministers invest time in their own faith formation either with Sr. Chabela (Prison) or Sr. Tere (Detention Center). The prison ministers all express also how they are evangelized by the many ways that the prisoners, detainees live Gospel values in the detention facilities. Ex : helping the recently arrived to find their way around, get what they need (blankets etc.) befriending and consoling. The overwhelming majority of these men and women are immigrants whose only “crime” is coming into the country without authorization i.e. being undocumented. I think that we can see these “facilities” as among the “alternative spaces” which Pope Francis evokes in his letter on Consecrated Life : So I trust that, rather than living in some utopia, you will find ways to create “alternative spaces” where the Gospel approach of self-giving, fraternity, embracing differences and love of one another can thrive.

Faith formation : Formation of Base Christian Community leaders who in turn help their neighbors develop an understanding of God’s Word and the social consequences of the Gospel in their small neighborhood community. (All immigrants)

We advocate for the immigrant population and become involved in community groups who work for

empowerment (Vecinos Unidos, Mujeres de Yucca, Otero Democratic Party meetings) and getting people who respect the immigrant population and are willing to work towards favorable legislation into positions within the government, at all levels, county, state and national.

Networking within the Chaparral community (making needs known, sharing resource information) as well as with NGOs and organizations outside of Chaparral : DMRS (diocesan migration services), Southern Border Coalition*, ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), an organization which documents abuses or human rights violations in the immigrant population so that they can be denounced and appropriate action taken at a State or National level ; Catholic Charities ; CAFÉ (An interfaith advocacy group), Colquitt community meetings, work with Doña Ana Health and Human Services which provides information in many areas but especially in the area of health services, Medicaid, health insurance.

The AMAs' (Assumption Mission Associates) work with Hispanic youth gives them a positive experience with youth from other parts of the United States — “Anglo youth.” They tutor as well as mentor youth at all levels : elementary, high school, Doña Ana Community College and New Mexico State University. They work with youth groups at the parish and in our own center, Casa Maria Eugenia. They are also involved with youth in other parish ministries...confirmation class, choir. Through these contacts the young people can experience respect, appreciation and encouragement from other young people. Our current AMA [2014-15], Kevin, spends a lot of “informal” fun time with the young people as well as teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) in Chaparral Middle School. The work of the AMAs is made possible and funded mainly by the Provincial program of AMA.

The second part of this reflection is about how migration got to be a priority in US Religious Congregations as well as in ours. And what it means for our lives and understanding of vows. The paths are similar.

In an address to Major Superiors, Brother Philip Pintom CFC, had an interesting way of asking some questions that flow from gazing with Christ at what is happening in our world today :

“What do I notice happening in our world today that is changing the way I live my life ? That is changing the way I think about vows and the accents that we now give to our vows ? What do my brothers and sisters say to me that make me question the beliefs by which I have lived in the past ? What is energizing me and giving me hope in the midst of all the negativity around me ? How am I naming the way I love, the meanings I make, and my and the world's needs ?”

“Naming the way I love”. That expression caught my attention. For me it a description of our vowed life, our way of loving. We might ask ourselves how our vows are expressing themselves in relation to the issues of migration and ecology. How do our vows “inform” and “form” our response to these questions ? Once I heard that there are as many ways of interpreting the vows as there are theologians. But I think all would agree that there is definitely a shift in emphasis today.... obedience is less about “obeying the superior” and more about discerning God's project for humanity and our planet earth ; chastity less about how we live our sexuality and more about building loving relationships with people and all of creation ; poverty less about “permissions” and “ownership questions” and more about simplicity of lifestyle and combating consumerism where a “more is better” mentality is depleting our natural resources. In general I think that the concrete consequences of our vowed commitment in the social order are receiving more attention. Perhaps Marie Eugenie added a fourth vow, To Extend the Kingdom of God, to the other three vows precisely because she felt this societal understanding of vows was missing in 19th century.

Our Chapter document of Ecology and Migration traces the Assumption prophetic response to the large

paradigm shifts that are happening today. It shows us the value of our internationality which can give witness in a world where globalization tends either to the exclusion of those who are different or to the promotion of a monoculture that simply eliminates all differences, flattening the variety and beauty of the real world.

Pope Francis' expectations from the Year of Grace for Consecrated Life also intersect with our Chapter documents. He says : Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless ; they will become "experts in communion" ; they will go out to the existential peripheries ; and the laity who share the same "charismatic grace" as a particular religious congregation (Friends of the Assumption) would become more aware of the gift they have received and respond together to the prompting of the Spirit in society today.

I'll end this reflection on a note of hope. It's the third aim for the Year of Consecrated Life : "To embrace the future with hope". We need to inspire hope. Focusing our attention can help. How ? If our brains, as neuroscience now suggests, take whatever we focus on as an invitation to make it happen, then the images and visions we live with matter a great deal. So we need to actively engage our imaginations in shaping visions of the future. Nothing we do is insignificant. Even a very small conscious choice of courage or of conscience can contribute to the transformation of the whole. Save water. See God's image in the face of the immigrant. It might be, for instance, the decision to put energy into that which seems most authentic to us, and withdraw energy and involvement from that which doesn't. This kind of intentionality is what Joanna Macy calls active hope. It is both creative and prophetic. In this difficult, transitional time, the future is in need of our imagination and our hopefulness. In the words of the French poet Rostand : "It is at night that it is important to believe in the light ; one must force the dawn to be borne by believing in it."

Transformation of society through Gospel values. Halting the exclusion of the poor immigrant ; halting the destruction of the environment. Sounds overwhelming and it is ! But as a young sister answered me when I teasingly said after a long conversation about transformation of society, "Do you think that we can solve all the problems of the world ?" "No, she answered with much conviction, but we can try !!"

Let's embrace the future as Pope Francis urges : This hope is not based on statistics or accomplishments, but on the One in whom we have put our trust (cf. 2 Tim 1:2), the One for whom "nothing is impossible" (Lk 1:37). This is the hope which does not disappoint ; it is the hope which enables consecrated life to keep writing its great history well into the future. It is to that future that we must always look, conscious that the Holy Spirit spurs us on so that he can still do great things with us.

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