

# Heart ♥ to ♥ Heart



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*Our December issue of Heart to Heart focuses on the issue of immigration and invites us to reflect on how we, in the spirit of St. Angela, might give an Angela response to this reality of our times. We begin with reflections from two Ursuline Sisters who have chosen to minister to and among our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters.*



## A Ministry of Accompaniment

I feel very blessed to be a volunteer in Accompaniment Ministry with *compas* (companions) who have come across our southern border seeking safety, security and often survival. In teams of two or more, we accompany asylum seekers offering them companionship, transportation, and translation services when they are required to report to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office. The “sub-title” on the ICE Office door – “Enforcement and Removal Operations” – speaks of the sense of insecurity and uncertainty the *compas* face when they report to ICE, not knowing the outcome.

Recently I accompanied a young mother with two little children. We had a very long wait in a crowded room at the ICE Office, quite a challenge with two little girls. Afterwards, when we got back to the car and got the little ones settled, the woman looked at me and let out a huge sigh. She didn’t need words in any language to convey her feelings of relief. She had been told that her papers were in order and she need not return to ICE for a year. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that her status will not change during that time, but for now the outcome of today’s visit is a positive message.

I am in awe and humbled by these *compas* as I reflect on the many hardships and risks they took to come here, as well as the challenges they face with the long, complicated and frequently changing process of asylum seeking. I realize more than ever the need for reforms in our immigration policies, in particular those related to asylum seekers.

—Madonna O’Hara, OSU  
St. Louis, MO



## At the U.S./Mexico Border

*“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” (Isaiah 9:2)*

Over the last 8 years, I have had several opportunities to go to the U.S./Mexico border to welcome immigrant families, released from detention centers in Texas.

I have met people who have been walking in darkness, both figuratively and literally, enduring unspeakable hardships during their journeying. The United States holds the promise of a better life and a safer place to raise their children.

I am always deeply moved by the courage and determination of the young mothers with small children: Having to wait in lines for food and clothing, to take showers, to make phone calls, to arrange for transportation to their final destinations, while trying to encourage their young children to eat food that is unfamiliar; and worrying at the same time that their children will be traumatized by what they have experienced.

It has been rewarding to share these experiences at the border with my Ursuline Sisters, Sr. Karen Schwane and Sr. Maria Teresa de Llano, and to be supported by our Ursuline Sisters.

I hear these words of Pope Francis, when he addressed an international group of Ursuline Sisters: “Today, no one can say any more: ‘This does not concern me.’”

—Sandy Wardell, OSU  
Bronx, NY



## Responding to the Needs of Refugees

*The Ursulines of the USA Eastern Province remind us of the small efforts and actions we can take on behalf of migrants and refugees.*

When a group of Eastern Province Ursulines met earlier this year for a time of faith-sharing, conversation at the end of the gathering focused on the needs of refugees and migrants. One of the sisters in the group was preparing to spend a few weeks at the U.S./Mexico border working with Ursulines who are helping the migrants there. A suggestion was made that at our next meeting, sisters could be invited to offer a free-will offering and the money could be used by the sisters at the border to purchase items needed by the migrants. In November and December, at another faith-sharing gathering, there was a similar free-will offering. These contributions were sent to Catholic Charities of New York which is assisting refugees and migrants in the New York area including those bussed in from Texas and Florida.”



## For Advent/Christmas Reading & Reflection

*“Were Jesus, Mary and Joseph refugees? Yes.”*

James Martin, SJ

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/12/27/were-jesus-mary-and-joseph-refugees-yes>



Rest on the Flight into Egypt (1879)  
Luc Olivier Merson (French, 1846–1920)

*Fleeing persecution at the hands of Roman authorities, the Holy Family takes refuge in Egypt. Joseph dozes beside a dying campfire while his donkey grazes on sparse desert grass. At left the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus, crowned with a halo of light, sleep peacefully in the arms of a sphinx, its eyes turned to the heavens where the first stars have begun to appear. A successful artist within the French Academy, Merson never traveled to North Africa, but his use of archeological detail creates the illusion of an eyewitness account—breathing new life into a time-honored subject.*

Photograph & Description © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Used with permission.

## The Vision of Hospitality

God, you call us to be your agents of hospitality  
And to open our doors to all those seeking refuge.

Awaken us from our indifference  
And open our eyes and hearts  
To those suffering as the Holy Family once did.

Amid the gloom of our world, in the tired and fearful faces  
Of refugees and migrants, we see Mary, Jesus, and Joseph  
Walking among us on their flight to Egypt.

Amid the uncertainty of our world, in the rugged tracks  
Of families forced to set out on perilous journeys,  
In their every step weighed down by hunger, rejection, and danger,  
We see the footsteps of Joseph and Mary, carrying the Child,  
Walking among us on their flight to Egypt.

Strip away all that blinds us from seeing You present,  
Often in the unwelcomed visitor, often unrecognizable:  
The one walking through our cities and our neighborhoods begging for food;  
The one asking for money on the bus;  
And the one knocking on our doors asking for work.

Strip away all that blinds us from seeing that Mary and Joseph,  
For whom there was no room, were the first to embrace  
“The One who comes to give all of us our document of citizenship,  
The One who in his poverty and humility proclaims  
And shows that true power and authentic freedom  
Are shown in honoring and assisting the weak and the frail.”

Strip away all that blinds us from seeing the Herods of today  
Who prey on the vulnerable, only to ensnare them  
Into the slavery of cheap labor and sexual trafficking.

Jolt our conscience to create space for “a new social imagination,”  
One that relinquishes fear of experiencing new forms of relationship,  
So none have to feel that there is no room for them on this earth. Amen.

—Written by Dianna Ortiz, OSU: Inspired by the Homily of Pope Francis, *Midnight Mass, Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, December 24, 2017*. Ignatian Solidarity Network.  
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