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Assumption Sisters of Chaparral, New Mexico, from left: Sister Nha Trang, Sister Diana, Sister Chabela and Sister Tere (Samantha Kominiarek)



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## Join the Conversation

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***Editor's note:*** *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is an Assumption Mission Associate in Chaparral, New Mexico.*

At the beginning of December, I received a text from one of my best friends with at least 15 exclamation marks and the link to Google's Year in Search 2019 video.

I look forward to this annual recap that reminds viewers of important events from the past 12 months while looking at some of the top trends Googled throughout the year.

The video from 2019 was all about people's Google searches of heroes. People searched for a variety of heroes, such as superheroes, real-life superheroes, unsung heroes, unlikely heroes, sheroes, supermoms and -dads. We also asked, "Can anyone be a hero?"




From left: Sister Chabela, Samantha Kominiarek, and Chaparral youth Oscar and Melenie in front of the Casa Maria Eugenia sign after an afternoon of playing in the yard (Provided photo)

This question led me to reflect on the multitude of heroes I have met throughout my life, especially the heroes I have met over the last few months in Chaparral and El Paso.

My first thought was immediately the Assumption Sisters of Chaparral. I think anyone who has ever met the sisters would be in agreement with me on this one.

The timing was funny, too: During Spirit Week at the middle school where I teach, one of the themes was "Hero Day," when the students and faculty could dress up

like their hero for the day. During lunch that afternoon, I explained to the sisters that I wore a Boston College T-shirt and a braid in my hair because I was dressing like Ellie, my younger sister, who is my hero. I have always admired Ellie's courage, kindness and dedication to her studies throughout our childhood and now, as she studies political science at Boston College.

I asked the sisters who their heroes were. Sister Chabela said she does not have a hero because the word "hero" felt like too big and strong of a word to describe the people she admires. "Hero" is not the proper word to describe people like Jesus or Mother Teresa, she said.

At the end of the Google video, it seems to give a definition for who a hero is: Heroes are people who use their powers to empower others.

The sisters do this.

Between their monthly meetings with Asunción Juntos (a prayer group and organization for local women), their participation in the St. Thomas More Church's Masses and events, and their ability to show up for the people of Chaparral by responding to the needs of the community, they really are "Movers & Shakers," as the Las Cruces Sun-News calls them.

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Their "power" is that they guide people toward discovering hope through love and accompaniment.

They use this power at the biweekly meals we serve at Annunciation House with Asunción Juntos. The sisters and the women bring deliciously prepared food, utensils, hairnets and plastic gloves. They also bring their spirit.

When we serve the meals, the guests enter the room, pick up a tray and are usually greeted by Sister Chabela, who hands them a napkin and utensils. Sister Chabela always says something that makes the guests smile, especially the children. The guests are then served a variety of Mexican food made with love.



Asunción Juntos, ready to serve a meal at Annunciation House (Provided photo)

The other women serving ask them questions and share smiles as the guests' plates fill with food. Once all the guests have been served and some have returned for seconds and thirds, we join the guests with plates filled with food to share the meal together in the *comedor*.

Sometimes a child will start to cry. Sister Chabela will go up to the child, and suddenly, the crying stops and laughter starts. Sister Chabela really has a way with children.

Sister Nha Trang, who is still learning Spanish, sits with guests, too. While they do not usually speak the same language, Sister Nha Trang's love and care are still so evident for the people with whom she is eating.

Sometimes, when we are sharing lunch together at the sisters' convent, Flor y Canto, people from Chaparral show up to visit. At times, they have treats for the sisters. Other times, they need assistance from the sisters, sometimes urgently. The sisters are always ready to do whatever they can.



From left: Sister Tere, Sister Chabela, Lily, Sister Diana, Sister Nha Trang and Sister Miriam. Lily, her husband, Brian, and their dogs, Marnie and Evie, stopped by Chaparral to visit the sisters on their way to visit Annette, Lily's sister, in San Antonio. Lily and Annette are both Assumption alumna from the Assumption Convent San Lorenzo in the Philippines. (Provided photo)

The sisters are so loved in the community. This became evident to me on my first weekend in Chaparral, when we were invited to three different birthday parties one Saturday. First, we went to a quinceañera Mass, then to two birthday parties for friends of the sisters, and then back to the quinceañera party. What a day that was!

The people of Chaparral know the sisters are there to support them during times of need. They also want to share in times of celebration with the sisters. This is so beautiful to me.

People who use their powers to empower others. This is what heroes do. This is what the sisters do, too. The sisters are heroes to the community of Chaparral — and to me.

[Samantha Kominiarek is doing a year of service with the Assumption Mission Associates in Chaparral, New Mexico.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** and **Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education** feature series.