News
Migration



Sr. Norma Pimentel, director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, speaks with a young resident of a tent camp Feb. 29, 2020, in Matamoros, Mexico. (CNS/David Agren)

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Davenport, Iowa — March 28, 2022
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Sr. Norma Pimentel, whose work with asylum-seekers has been recognized by Pope Francis, Time magazine and others, will receive the Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award on April 21 in Davenport.

Bishop Thomas Zinkula of Davenport will present the award to Pimentel in Christ the King Chapel at St. Ambrose University.

Pimentel, 68, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, has ministered to migrant people crossing into the United States for years.

The Quad City Pacem in Terris Coalition, an interfaith group, nominated Pimentel as the award's 50th recipient for her dedication in serving migrant people and asylum-seekers as executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas.

Zinkula endorsed the nomination, which the Diocese of Davenport administers.

The award honors St. John XXIII and commemorates his 1963 encyclical, "Pacem in Terris" ("Peace on Earth"), which called on humanity to secure peace among all nations. Previous recipients include the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, St. Teresa of Kolkata, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Zen Buddhist leader Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama.

"Last May, Pope Francis sent a video message to Sister Norma thanking her and the team at Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley for taking in and helping

immigrants in need," Zinkula said in a statement.

"What impresses me the most about Sister Norma is that she responds to pressing human needs with such visible joy and humility," he added. "She is truly a model of Christian love."

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Pimentel said, "It is an honor for someone who is, like me, a child of God, a servant of God to be recognized for the work I'm doing, which is actually for the people I'm reaching out to and helping.

"It gives me a sense of affirmation that we're in this together. The true focus is the actual humanity of the people who are suffering at the border."

She oversees the charitable arm of the Diocese of Brownsville, providing oversight of ministries and services in the Rio Grande Valley. The services include emergency assistance, homelessness prevention, clinical counseling, food programs and the Humanitarian Respite Center.

In recognition of her work on the U.S.-Mexico border, she received the Martin Luther King Jr. "Keep the Dream Alive" Award from Catholic Charities USA in 2015.

Time magazine included Pimentel in its 2020 Time100 list of most influential people in the world.

Pimentel credited all who work alongside her and support the ministries of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley for the success the agency has had.

"We are a people of God, people driven by the presence of God in ourselves and in others. When we see human suffering, we cannot turn our backs, we must respond," she said.

Pimentel said she keeps her focus on those fleeing difficult situations in Central America and seeking a better life in the United States, not on naysayers who see no room for welcoming the suffering.

"I tell myself to focus on the people I need to focus on," she said. "My energy needs to be focused on doing good for the people who need me to focus on them."