Voices of Sisters

Migration



Elia Cárdenas, a lay Dominican, with a team of volunteers at Holy Family Refugee Center in El Paso, Texas (Courtesy of Elia Cárdenas)



by Sr. Elia Cárdenas

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Today, I went for a walk, looking for different shades of green to clear my mind. Suddenly, I saw an advertisement about Donald Trump and the 2024 election in someone's yard. It made me sad to think that the leader of this country, made up of migrants, is against immigrants, and that this is causing division among friends, family, communities and, worse, within our own church.

I am part of a ministry that visits a shelter connected to Annunciation House once a week to bring dinner and kind words of encouragement to those seeking a better present and a better future for themselves and their families. While we are there, we not only serve dinner that we had previously cooked, but we also sit at the table with immigrants to listen to their stories and struggles.

Political decisions at the highest levels — those made by the president, Congress and the Supreme Court — shape policies that impact us locally. One ongoing example is the litigation before the Texas Supreme Court over the future of Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas, a shelter serving migrants. On Jan. 13, the court heard arguments on whether the shelter should remain open, despite Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's claim that it violates state immigration laws. This lawsuit is part of a broader political effort by the state to demand immigration documents from individuals who have already been processed by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Given this situation, I question whether the state even has jurisdiction over immigration matters — or if this is yet another instance of the racist campaign of hate and division that continues to build walls larger than those we already see in our border area.

It is so easy to judge and be guided by the comments from social media, and conspiracy theorists. But when we people who are not involved in politics visit and share with our migrant brothers and sisters, we realize the great challenge it is for them to leave their homes and leave everything behind. From our comfort, it is difficult to imagine what they have gone through with their governments, the cartels and the waves of violence to make that decision. And these poor brothers and sisters of ours sometimes struggle for more than a year to cross the border. They are hungry and cold and prey to injustices, rape, smuggling, assault and abuse. What other horrors can we add to this painful list?

> How have we lost respect and caring love for our neighbor?
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I remember so many stories I have heard — stories that have led me to ask for forgiveness for the abuses committed, not only in my native Mexico but also in this country, against migrant families. My heart aches. I reflect and ask myself: What is happening to us, to our humanity? How have we lost respect and caring love for our neighbor?

We have read and seen historical documentaries of the horrors that racism can cause to human beings. So, this is a plea from the depths of my soul for the Great Spirit to breathe from the four cardinal points on our rulers and all the people in power who make the decisions for our country — decisions that impact our continent and our world. I pray their hearts may be moved to make more humane decisions, where peace, justice and mercy embrace each other. Meanwhile, united with those of us who believe, I will continue visiting shelters to bring words of encouragement and support and to raise a prayer for a more just and peaceful world.

Update: On Feb. 17, the El Paso migrant shelters began to be deactivated as the border is closed. We pause from our work, and in letting go of our service to our migrant brothers and sisters, we are aware that God is present among us.

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