

Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

Vol. 3, No. 2

February 2018

Living Angela's Spirit of Peacemaking & Reconciliation with a Compassionate Heart

Focus: Issues of Immigration

Reflecting on living with a compassionate heart is very appropriate for the season of Lent, which begins February 14th, as this is a time when we are called to a "change of heart" in our own lives. Camilla Burns, in a talk entitled "The Wise Woman of Brescia," speaks of how Angela reveals her compassionate heart.

"Many different kinds of people had access to her and were comfortable with her. Men and woman of all ages and varying social classes could enter into the life of Angela and find rest and refreshment. She invited them into her own piazza, the piazza of her centered being, and encouraged them to find their own."



Angela could meet in a meaningful way those who were mourning a loss in their lives. The death of her parents and a sister and the subsequent relocation, and the loss of her vision when on pilgrimage to the Holy Land were life experiences that fostered her own ability to "suffer with another" – from the Latin root for compassion.

Our focus this month on issues related to immigration is an on-going concern worldwide. It is of particular interest in the United States now because of the March deadline for the passage of necessary legislation to renew Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). What a blessing it is to have Sr. Maria Teresa de Llano, OSU, share with us her experience of ministry with refugees at the Texas/Mexico border. We are very grateful for this poignant reflection.

MINISTRY OF COMPASSION

In a spirit of compassion,
let us embrace all those
fleeing from war and hunger,
and forced by discrimination,
persecution, poverty and
environmental degradation
to leave their homeland.

*Pope Francis,
World Day of Prayer for Peace,
2018*

The word "compassion" has many meanings for me depending on the situation in which I find myself at a given moment. Matthew Kelly expressed one of the most meaningful definitions of compassion in his book *Resisting Happiness*: "taking someone else's cross... so they can catch their breath, have a short rest, or simply have their faith in the goodness of humanity restored."

I did just that when I was living in Laredo, Texas, assisting refugees as they flocked to our border, fleeing the crime, drug lords, and gangs, hoping to find a safe place where they would be welcomed and could raise their

children. Many of the refugees, mostly women with children, were coming from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala where the violence ranks near the highest among countries in North America.

They came by the hundreds bringing with them only what they could carry, taking great risks as they boarded a train whose nickname is "The Beast." They left other immediate and extended family members, sold what little they had, and headed north. Their only hope came from looking forward and trusting that their faith in God would carry them through this journey.

My ministry at the time was to assist them once they had received temporary asylum by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Department (I.C.E.). I would welcome them and offer them the basics they would need to continue the final part of their journey to be united with relatives and acquaintances already in the United States.

For the most part I stayed with them for about two to four hours before finally taking them to the bus station where they would board a bus and travel for hours, sometimes days, to get to their final destinations.

I offered them the basics of water, food, a shower, a change of clothes, connecting them with their relatives, making sure they had their bus tickets, and, finally, watched as they boarded their buses.

I tried to provide a safe haven, if only for just a few hours, and listened attentively to their stories of why

they had left their countries. They left behind a place they called "home," a country they loved, and family and friends they love and will never forget. They endured unimaginable danger: some were kidnapped for ransom, beaten, and their meager savings taken from them. Women, as well as girls, were raped, and those who were supposed to protect them took advantage of them. And all of this they suffered for a better and safer life, not so much for themselves but for their children.



I kept a journal of those whom I had the privilege of assisting, and it includes pictures of my "guests." I often go back and read the entries and smile as I recall the encounter as our paths crossed if only for a few

hours. I wonder where they are now and how they are doing. I fear for them as this administration starts "rounding up" with no concern or compassion those who had temporary asylum here. I trust that the goodness and compassion of so many of us in the United States will move us to take action and resist racism, bigotry, and xenophobia so that we may become a country like that of our forefathers and mothers, who also came to this country searching for freedom and the right to live without fear for their lives. I would like to make Matthew Kelly's words come to life in each and every one of us as we open our hearts and arms to welcome others: "taking someone else's cross... so they can catch their breath, have a short rest, or simply have their faith in the goodness of humanity restored."

Maria Teresa de Llano, osu

Reflection questions:

- Sr. Maria Teresa shares a definition of compassion which is meaningful for her ministry with immigrants and refugees. Is there a description of compassion that is significant for your life now?
- How do I now feel called to live with a compassionate heart?

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.

If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

~Dalai Lama