

Heartbeats



The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

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*As we continue to reflect on Angela's pilgrim spirit, we remember that, while she made many interesting trips, it was the **inward journey** that seemed to touch her most. With her listening heart, where God dwelled and guided her, she was able to discover the meaning and the sacred in everything she saw and experienced.*

In these days of the journey to Christmas, we are mindful that Mary and Joseph, too, were pilgrims, moving from place to place, always attentive to the holy. Some say they were also refugees. We know that they, with Jesus, experienced separation, false accusations, violence, terrorism, and the poverty of having nowhere to stay.

Each step of life's pilgrimage leads us to the God who comes, over and over, into the brokenness of our world. The daily walk, undertaken with faith and hope, opens our eyes to others making the journey, especially the poor and those who have left home to find a better life. When we share the struggles of walking together, we find new friendships that lead to community.

A Joyous Christmas to all of you, fellow pilgrims, who live this journey of communion!



TWO URSULINE SISTERS SHARE THEIR JOURNEY WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN

From Mary Lapping, OSU—

During the seven years I've been working with immigrant women, I have witnessed firsthand some of the challenges that daily confront them. Take for example, the simple need of a handyman or someone to do house repairs. I have seen my friends taken advantage of by someone posing as a repair person, willing to take money but not do the job. Then there is the barrage of junk mail that comes in. Often the only way to tell if this is something important is to first translate it into a familiar language and then try to figure out what it means. Then there is the legal-speak of government documents which must be responded to.

One of the most personal challenges for immigrants is to need a doctor and have to take along a translator. Often, it is the translators who schedule a time to suit their convenience and then notify the person the next day. I've had to cancel many an English class because the woman I'm working with didn't know about an appointment until just the day before.

There is also the discouragement of being unable to help family members who would like to come to our country, which would require spending much money to hire an immigration lawyer with no guarantee of success. In most cases, this would take many years before the process could even be begun.

All of the immigrant women I have worked with have been hard workers, eager to make friends and to be good neighbors. They have a great sense of hospitality and welcome. They are also very grateful for the opportunities afforded them in this country, even while longing for the possibility of returning to their own country someday.

From Pauline Lorch, OSU—

Iam one of some 250 volunteer tutors working through Women's Immigrant and Refugee Program in St. Louis. We meet women in their own homes since it is often difficult if not impossible for them to attend classes outside their homes. A further goal is to provide English lessons designed for each individual.

Alahi, a native Bosnian, had been in the U.S. some 17 years when I met her at her apartment. Her husband had signed her up for classes because he wants both of them to acquire citizenship. Because Alahi had been comfortably surrounded by other Bosnians all these years, her need of English had been limited, and she found the English lessons so taxing that she did not want to continue. In contrast, Mina, having a background of 12 years of education in Afghanistan, was highly motivated. Her goal was clear: "I want to get a job." Mina and the extended family with whom she lived introduced me to their very religious setting with a request to take off my shoes when entering their prayer space. Invitations to join them for a meal were frequent and involved sitting on the floor with their extended family.

Kelli began our sessions with a fair knowledge of English but need of a more extensive vocabulary in order to reach her goal: to become a United States certified phlebotomist, a profession in which she was

employed for some 30 years in Greece. Kelli has had a difficult time since coming to the United States. Her husband left her with no financial resources after a divorce. Through Greek friends, she connected with the Missionary Sisters of Charity, living and working with them for six months before being introduced to Catholic Charities, through which she found work as an assistant distributing medications. She is presently living in an artist's studio, but looking for other living arrangements come December, when the artist returns from Ohio where he has been painting icons in a Church for several years.

Working with these women has added a dimension to my retirement which I have found very enriching. To meet women of such different cultural realities, with different experiences of the United States and different access to resources both within and beyond themselves, is giving me a deeper understanding of both the hopes and obstacles for immigrant women.

For Reflection

*Blessed are those whose strength is in You,
Whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. (Psalm 84:5)*

- What in your daily pilgrimage needs to be pondered and prayed about, so as to discover the meaning and sacred within it?
- Who are your fellow travelers in these December days? How might you come to know them better and share light with them?



"Remind me in countless ways, as I walk the sunlit hours of this day, that I am on a sacred journey along with the stars traveling through space, that I am on a pilgrim path."

— Edward Hays, *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim: A Personal Manual for Prayer and Ritual*