

## Week 1 [April 24-30, 2021]:



Hi, everyone! Kathy and I thought that we would update you on what is happening here in El Centro since it has been one week since we arrived.

First, El Centro is remote ... over an hour from the Yuma Airport. Most of the drive is through a sandy, barren expanse of land. It is hot! However, the first two days here it was windy and unusually cool. We have been in short sleeves and have carried a lightweight jacket or sweater in the car ... just in case it gets chilly in the air conditioning. We really haven't had to use them.

Kathy and I have been working in two places that Catholic Charities of San Diego is organizing. One is the Travel Lodge in El Centro, a 20-minute walk from our house. We usually drive because of the heat. The other site is the Ramada in Holtville, which is a 20-minute drive from El Centro.

The people that we are seeing are families, not minors that have crossed the border alone. The families usually cross the border and then are picked up, taken to a center and processed. How many days they are there before the Customs Border Patrol (CBP) brings them to the Ramada depends. When they arrive at the Ramada, they are tired, have not showered for days and have only the clothes that they are wearing. They are wearing shoes with no shoelaces because CBP has taken them away. The arriving families are immediately lined up and tested for covid. If someone tests positive or has covid symptoms, he/she and everyone in that family stay at the Ramada in quarantine for 10 days. Those who test negative are taken by van to the Travel Lodge to stay temporarily. They may be there one or two nights until their sponsor makes flight arrangements to fly them to wherever they need to go in the U.S.

Kathy and I are doing whatever needs to be done, and the personnel from Catholic Charities is very grateful. Every day is different. For example, today we were at the Ramada by 8 a.m. There were only four women (all from Brazil) who needed to be taken to the airport, so we were not needed to drive. We spent some time speaking with the women (a mixture of Portuguese, Spanish and Italian) and listening to their stories. Afterwards we separated clothes, bags of food and toys that had been donated yesterday to celebrate the Day of the Child (Día del Niño), and we distributed backpacks with all the donated goods to every



child at the Ramada. We wore our face masks and face shield and had to have our phones handy (for translation purposes) to speak to the person who came to the door.

On other days Kathy has driven a van to the airport, and I have been her co-pilot. Part of the routine is to help the people traveling to get their boarding passes and give them directions for passing through TSA. Sometimes we help give out food at the Travel Lodge. Other times we have helped to organize the clothing at both sites.

The days are busy, and we are tired at the end of the afternoon. We buy and cook our own food.

We will try to send a weekly email to keep you up to date.

Take care. Let's pray for one another as we continue ahead with this adventure!

## **Week 2 [May 1- 7]:**



Hi, everyone! Kathy, Margaret and I are at the end of our second week of IHM presence at the US-Mexico border. We are so grateful for the support of all who have emailed, called and prayed for us!

We are attaching a few photos to give you a sense of our mission here.

1. Margaret (M) speaks via Google Translate with a Brazilian family that has just arrived at the lodge.
2. Margaret (M), Kathy (I) and Mary Elaine (S) help to bag and distribute food to families at the lodge.
3. Mary Elaine (S) brings gifts donated for Día del Niño (Day of the Child) to children in quarantine with their families at the hotel.
4. Kathy (I) poses with a woman ready to leave for the airport. The day before Kathy helped her find the clothes that she is wearing among the many donations that we have been organizing.
5. A family leaving for the airport to be united with their family in the US asks Margaret (M) and Kathy (I) if they will have their photo taken with them.

During these first few weeks, a lot of our time has been spent organizing clothes and other donated articles, bagging and distributing food, and driving families to the airport

as well as greeting guests (asylum seekers) that arrive at the lodge and saying goodbye to them as they leave to be united with their family in the US.

Next week we hope to set up an art space in the back of the arrival/ departure room at the lodge. We will invite children accompanied by an adult to use play dough, draw a picture, make a collage, or just be creative in whatever way they might like. Perhaps you have some creative ideas and art projects that you might want to do with children of different ages. We can get the supplies that you need here.



We have also been asked to make some welcome signs (English, Spanish and Portuguese) for the intake room at the hotel. We have had less contact with the families at the hotel because they are in quarantine. At the moment, the state does the intake and delivers food to the hotel rooms. In a couple weeks, it seems that will change. The state has asked Catholic Charities to take over the intake process. Food will be made in the hotel kitchen (by professionals) and we will be helping to deliver

meals to the families in their rooms. So ... the work will be stepping up just as we increase our IHM volunteers in June.

Tomorrow we will be picking up Sister Margaret Joseph (I) at the airport. That will make us a community of four IHMs during the third week of this adventure. We are gradually growing in size and gaining momentum! We wonder if our first sisters in Monroe felt a similar sense of God's loving presence and energy as their community grew little by little. Let's continue to pray for one another!

Kathy, Margaret and Mary Elaine