

Week 5 [May 22-28]:



Hello from El Centro, CA! Some of you can already picture where this message is coming from because you have been here and others of you will soon come to know it, and we hope love it. As we finish Week 5, we say goodbye to Jeannette and Connie. Thank you, C & J, for your flexibility and willingness to drive wherever and for all the shopping sprees that you made to assure that the children and their families had what they needed to continue their

journey.

In the middle of this past week, Sister Eileen Reilly joined us. She came a week early to help with the growing number of asylum seekers that are being released by the Border Patrol and arriving each day at the shelters in Holtville and El Centro. Not sure why there has been an increase in clients? However, there also seems to be an increase in Border Patrol trucks along the route between El Centro and Yuma. Are there more BP trucks because more people are crossing the border, or are more people being picked up because there is a greater presence of BP on the route? I guess the why for the increase is not so important. For us who are volunteering, it simply means more families to welcome and more needs to which we can attend.

Today Eileen and I made the two-hour trip to the San Diego Airport and the two-hour return to Holtville in seven hours. We left from Holtville with eight people, stopped in El Centro to pick up a family of four and then headed for San Diego. We were surprised to find the road west, which winds through the desert and is usually deserted, to be packed with cars for the Memorial Day weekend. We were even more surprised to find the first parking lot at the airport full, and we had to flounder to find the directions for the extra lot. After several U-turns in downtown San Diego and two drive bys of the terminal from which the families were to depart, we finally found the parking lot and had only an hour to check in all twelve passengers. Thankfully the airport scene was uneventful, and all the families passed rapidly through TSA. And that was our day! No folding clothes, organizing boxes, distributing meals, straightening up the play area or checking on the quarantined families at the hotel in Holtville today. Every day is different and rewarding. It just requires a little flexibility, a good sense of humor, a spirit of adventure ... and a great deal of organization!

We are looking forward to the arrival of Donna Korba, Mary Katherine Hamilton, Dora Lezovich, Mary Catherine Chamberlain and Christine Cunningham tomorrow. Donna will join Eileen and me at House #1, and the four others will share House #2. The second

house has a grill. That could be fun, especially with Memorial Day right around the corner ... although we will be working until about 4:00 or 5:00 p.m. Plus, it is hot outside until about 7:00 p.m.

Terri Haug has rented a car to transport those in House #2 from June 21 to July 3.

Kathy Brown also rented a car for House #3 from June 19 to July 3.

Let us pray for one another ... safe travels for those who are returning home and those who will be flying into Yuma tomorrow. May our IHM spirit of joyful, loving, self-emptying and hospitable service be evident to those whom we accompany! May the missionary zeal of Alphonsus, Louis Gillet, Theresa Maxis and our first sisters carry us through each day.

With grateful hearts,

Team El Centro (Jeannette, Connie, Eileen and Mary Elaine)

Week 6 [May 29-June 4]:



Greetings from your sisters in El Centro, CA!

Saturday, May 29, we (Eileen and Mary Elaine) met 5 more sisters at the airport. We are now seven IHMs in El Centro, and we are living in two different houses. Several evenings this past week, we gathered after work hours to grill, eat, reflect, pray, tell stories, dream together and laugh! Working and living with IHMs from all three congregations is an added

dimension that has enriched our experience at the border.

As for our volunteer service with Catholic Charities ... On most days there are two or three trips to the Yuma and/or San Diego Airport. Our IHM van drivers and their co-pilots have become very familiar with the route through the desert (both west and east). They know the airport routine well (tickets and TSA) and could probably get work in a travel agency accompanying international passengers to the airport and caring for them there.

Organizing clothes, art materials and toys as well as checking on and talking to quarantined families continues to be a major part of the work for those who are not on

the road to Yuma or San Diego. Each sister has her own unique way of taking the initiative and stepping up to meet the needs of the families and the Catholic Charities personnel. A sense of joy abounds even when we are filling snack bags, restocking the water in the refrigerator, buying clothes, books and puzzles or washing the van! Holding a baby while the mother looks for clean clothing, kneeling next to a child to help her find a toy that she can play with in her hotel room and answering the questions of adults who are struggling to talk to their families and to find air flights are simple but heartfelt ways to be with the people.

It is great news that those of you who volunteered in the month of July received a green light to come. Agnes, Susan, Annette and Francis Xavier, you can make your flight arrangements for the Yuma, Arizona Airport. As for Mimi, Barbara, Mary Margaret, Rose Patrice and Rita, we are still waiting to hear from Nadine whether you will fly directly to San Diego to help there or come to the Imperial Valley (El Centro and Holtville).

Today we are awaiting the arrival of Terri Jordan. Her presence will make us a border team of eight! Let's keep one another in prayer as we open ourselves to the pain and suffering of our immigrant brothers and sisters. Let each encounter be meaningful!

With grateful hearts,

Team El Centro (Eileen, Donna, Mary Katherine, Dora, Mary Catherine, Christine and Mary Elaine)