

MARCH 2023

# ANNUNCIATION HOUSE NEWSLETTER

## Letter from the Director

BY RUBEN GARCIA

In December 2022, over 27,000 migrants and refugees from Latin America and beyond — especially Venezuela and Nicaragua — arrived in El Paso. Many of them have sought hospitality at Annunciation House and the network of shelters that exist throughout the region. They arrive at our border because of violence, political instability, poverty, environmental disasters, and climate change in their home countries—because they do not have the ability to pursue a dignified life in the places they are from. Fundamentally, they are coming because of the exorbitant inequality that exists throughout our hemisphere that means a relatively small number of people are able to enjoy great riches while many others, quite literally, go hungry. The real crisis is not the people who are arriving at the border in search of safety, it is the fear and greed that wall us off from wanting others to enjoy what we have.



## In this issue:

- Pg. 1: Letter from the Director
- Pg. 5: Updates from Our Houses
- Pg. 9: Borderlands News Digest
- Pg. 10: Between A Fence and a Hard Place: The Deadly Consequences of the US Border Wall
- Pg. 15: 2022 Volunteers: By the Numbers
- Pg. 17: Mary Bull: Celebrating a decade of service at Annunciation House
- Pg. 17: Volunteer Reflections: Suffering & Joy
- Pg. 19: Support Our Work

El Paso is not a wealthy city, but it is rich in a culture of hospitality. This community has consistently welcomed people in need by providing food, a place to stay, and a period of safety before they continue on to family, friends, or work in other parts of the country. El Paso has continued to honor this tradition this holiday season, as people throughout the city carried out remarkable acts of hospitality. We know people who have opened their homes to families who would otherwise sleep on the streets in freezing temperatures; people who have made their vehicles into additional sleeping areas; people who bring meals and coffee to the refugees on the streets every day; faith communities, schools, and community agencies who have transformed their spaces into temporary shelters. We are humbled and honored to work alongside people who believe wholeheartedly in the tradition of welcome, and act on that belief.

And yet, the people of El Paso cannot meet the needs of this time alone. The present moment is an opportunity to reimagine the country's response to refugees, to fashion policies that center human dignity, and to acknowledge our fundamental interconnectedness to one another. It is a moment to recognize that borders are places of possibility, not places of crisis.



Our current immigration policies are based in, at best, ineffective bureaucracy and, at worst, hypocrisy, fear, and exploitation. The United States is dependent upon the labor and economic benefits that immigrants provide, but we are not willing to see the people who provide this labor as full and dignified human beings, or extend to them the rights that we take for granted.

For decades, the United States has played an outsized role in contributing to the causes of human migration across borders, especially in the Western hemisphere. In the 1980s, the United States government provided arms and support to repressive governments in Central America, whose tactics led to mass suffering and death. More recently, trade agreements have enriched American businesses and allowed American consumers access to cheap goods while making it impossible for many in Mexico and Central America to earn a living wage in their home countries. And let's not forget that the comfortable lifestyle many Americans enjoy has made the United States a chief driver of climate change, which disproportionately harms low-income countries, intensifying droughts and other destructive weather patterns that have driven people to seek safety and livelihoods elsewhere.

It is past time to acknowledge the reality that we cannot have it both ways. We must update our laws and acknowledge that our country's wealth has been enabled by generations of exploitation. We have a moral and historical obligation to share our abundance so that all may have the ability to thrive. Such sharing is not charity; it is a debt that we owe. And making good on that debt will not impoverish us, but enrich us, as we recognize the immigrants and refugees in our communities as neighbors, teachers, and friends.

The U.S.'s immigration policies are not only rooted in pervasive inequality, they are causes of death. In our borderlands and on the migratory route, people die every day while seeking safety and a dignified life. This is profoundly unacceptable. We must imagine and implement humane ways for people to seek safety in a way that, at minimum, does not endanger their lives. But we can imagine more than just their survival. We can also create conditions that align with the realities of our economic and human interconnectedness. Goods and money flow freely across our border with Mexico. Why do these things rate more consideration than human beings?

The work to build anew may seem daunting, but there is an immediate way to begin to act in service of a more just immigration framework. Annunciation House is inviting communities around the country—faith communities, community groups, or other organizations—to offer hospitality to newcomers for a day or several days before they join loved ones in other parts of the country. What would this look like? After communication and preparations, we would

arrange for a bus of recently arrived refugees (around 50 people, 15-20 families) to be sent to your community. They would need temporary shelter, food, and sanitary facilities. Most would have friends or family members elsewhere in the country who can take them in, so the welcoming group's main task would be to help each guest make contact with those loved ones and make arrangements to travel onward. This is the work El Paso has been doing for generations. Faith communities in Kansas City and Denver have already responded to our invitation, and are learning what our volunteers already know: that when we reach out to our neighbor in need, we receive far more than we give.

To begin a new work like this is daunting, we know. Yet at its core, the work of hospitality is straightforward: offering someone who is hungry a plate of food, someone who is tired a place to lay their head, someone who has been traveling for months a shower and change of clothes. It is an act of loving our neighbors as ourselves—and expanding who we know our neighbor to be.

**"We have a moral and historical obligation to share our abundance so that all may have the ability to thrive. Such sharing is not charity; it is a debt that we owe."**



As the community of El Paso mobilized to find shelter for so many refugees this past December—during the height of the Christmas season—Annunciation House’s Catholic identity invited us to reflect on the clear parallels between the story of the Holy Family and the people who arrive at our doorstep seeking refuge. We also consider the Magnificat, in which Mary goes to visit her cousin with news of her pregnancy. She breaks out in song, celebrating God for being ardently present with the poor: “God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.”

In the 1970s and ‘80s, the governments of Guatemala, Argentina, and Nicaragua banned the Magnificat. (People from these countries—especially Nicaragua—are now at our border in notable numbers.) Ordinary citizens, however, refused to cease their recitation, both as an act of resistance and because of their belief that God stood firmly with those who have been oppressed.

It is time to radically re-envision our country’s policies and stance towards immigrants. Let this begin by following the example of people throughout the Americas who have repeated Mary’s words in resistance and faith, even at times when doing so was risky: by believing that we have the duty to end exploitative structures of power, and the promise of creating a world in which all people can enjoy good things given by God.





# Updates From Our Houses

This February, Annunciation House celebrated our 45th anniversary. Over these many years, we have never wavered in our commitment to accompany the migrant, refugee, and economically vulnerable peoples of the border region through hospitality, advocacy, and education. Some aspects in the struggle — and the joy — of migration persist over time. Many other aspects are in constant flux, shifting with political tides, new laws and policies, environmental disasters, and new conflicts and crises in other parts of the world. As such, we are called to lean on faith while we live with uncertainty, and to constantly adapt and grow. The last few years have been no exception to this rule. Read below for a few updates from each of our houses:

## Annunciation House

After nearly two years of temporary closure for major renovations, Annunciation House reopened for hospitality in late 2022.

Annunciation House has been the original and primary house of hospitality since the organization's founding in 1978. The building is now over 100 years old, and due to its heavy use supporting a thriving community of refugees and volunteers for nearly half that time, the building was in very worn condition. We are profoundly grateful to the thousands of donors who generously contributed funds to renovate the building, enabling us to provide dignified and comfortable shelter to the poor in migration.



The renovations brought Annunciation House into compliance with important building codes and the Americans with Disabilities Act. For example, we were able to move the kitchen and dining room from the second to the first floor and make all restrooms handicap-accessible. This has enabled Annunciation House to become the primary receiving site for refugees who have fallen from the border wall and are dealing with serious injuries and broken bones. Many of these refugees come to our houses with wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, and external fixators. The renovations have enabled us to meet their needs, provide comfortable housing while they heal, and ensure that they can fully participate in community life in our houses.

## Casa del Refugiado (CDR)

After operating Casa del Refugiado for over three years beginning in April 2019, Annunciation House closed this hospitality site in August 2022. Casa del Refugiado was opened with the goal of expanding our hospitality to the maximum number of refugees during periods of heavy migration. At times, CDR and its numerous volunteers provided shelter for upwards of 1,000 refugees a night. CDR served a critical role in preventing refugee releases to the street, providing temporary shelter, hot meals, clothing, transportation assistance, and compassionate care to tens of thousands of refugees over its three years of operation.

However, CDR also presented many challenges. The implementation of Title 42 at times reduced the arrivals of refugees to a trickle, leaving CDR empty for months at a time. On the other hand, CDR's substantial size required a huge number of volunteers to operate, which became increasingly difficult to maintain particularly with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. And there were serious building maintenance issues, such as a leaking roof, that sometimes made sections of the building unusable. After weighing the decision for several months, the Board of Directors ultimately determined that it was unsustainable for Annunciation House to continue operating CDR, and began closing the site down. We have remained in communication with the City of El Paso, among others, to support hospitality efforts in the absence of CDR and develop more sustainable solutions.



Mural by artist Waka Laura





## Casa Papa Francisco

As the saying goes, “when one door closes, another opens.” In the midst of closing down Casa del Refugiado, Annunciation House acquired a large, permanent new hospitality site in El Paso to continue providing hospitality in the context of large refugee arrivals. The house will be known as Casa Papa Francisco, in honor of Pope Francis’s efforts to draw attention to the plight of refugees and his call to communities around the world to meet them with welcome. The building was formerly a convent, and we are inspired by its spaciousness and the potential it has to meet growing needs for housing in El Paso.

Some parts of Casa Papa Francisco were regularly used by its former occupants and are in good condition, enabling us to immediately begin offering hospitality to recently arrived refugees in this space. Eventually, Casa Papa Francisco will also become the primary site for our Border Awareness Experience program, an immersion learning program meant to give participants an increased understanding of the realities of immigration. This house also has a beautiful chapel that is large enough to use as a meeting space. In January 2023, we hosted an asylum workshop here for a group of about 40 refugees. A volunteer attorney (Nancy Oretskin) and translator (Molly Molloy) guided the group through the process of requesting asylum, helped participants fill out their applications in Spanish, translated their documents into English, and helped them submit their forms online.

Like Annunciation House, Casa Papa Francisco is an old building in need of repairs and renovation. We are currently analyzing the building’s needs and working to prioritize the upgrades and renovations that will allow us to use this building to its fullest potential.





Photo by volunteer Emma Brown (@instagrandmabrown)

## Casa Vides

With the opening of Casa Papa Francisco, we have shifted our long-running hospitality program for Social Security beneficiaries from Casa Vides to Casa Papa Francisco. These beloved guests made Casa Papa Francisco feel like home right away and they have been lending a hand as we get this new space up and running.

In the meantime, moving the Social Security program to Casa Papa Francisco has allowed us to devote Casa Vides to additional hospitality for recently-arrived refugees. Additionally, Casa Vides continues its long history as a house of long-term hospitality, providing shelter for over 40 refugees and families with ongoing legal cases and longer-term hospitality needs.

## Casa Anunciación Juárez & Albergue Papa Francisco

Casa Anunciación Juárez opened in January of 2020 to help provide hospitality to refugees forced to remain in Mexico under the so-called “Migrant Protection Program” (MPP). Shortly after opening Casa Anunciación Juárez, we also opened a much larger hospitality site in Juárez named Albergue Papa Francisco. For two years, these shelters served a critical role providing housing to refugees denied their legal right to seek asylum.

Once President Biden took office and ended MPP, the refugees living in Casa Anunciación Juárez and Albergue Papa Francisco were slowly allowed to enter the United States. Albergue Papa Francisco emptied and eventually we closed it completely, returning the building to the Catholic Diocese of Juárez.

We held onto Casa Anunciación Juárez a little longer so as to provide hospitality to new refugee families arriving in Juárez who continued to be impacted by Title 42. In particular, we are grateful to our long-time partner Cristina Coronado who led hospitality efforts at this site and who rallied the funding to keep Casa Anunciación Juárez operational. However, our own volunteer resources were increasingly focused on hospitality in El Paso. As a result, in October 2022 we fully passed over this work to Cristina and the Columban Mission Center of El Paso. Thank you, Cristina, for carrying on this torch!

# Borderlands News Digest



To provide context about the border, the policies and realities that affect the people we serve, and the framework within which Annunciation House works, we invite you to read this small selection of articles, and continue reading beyond! Click on the headline to follow a link to each article.

## [El Paso Pastor Serves Migrants As Long As It Takes](#)

BY CINDY RAMIREZ  
EL PASO MATTERS, 2/6/23

The numbers of refugees arriving to El Paso has fluctuated, from more than a thousand daily in December to less than 200 per day in recent weeks. One constant has been the hospitality of borderlands churches, local residents, and area organizations, who—no matter the weather, circumstances, or numbers—have been present to the needs of refugees.

## [Illegal](#)

BY ALLEGRA LOVE  
EL PASO MATTERS, 1/26/23

This article provides updates on Title 42 and how recent changes in the federal policy affect Haitians, Cubans, Venezuelans, and Nicaraguans at the border. In particular, the United States has implemented two new programs: an app called "CBP One" that requires asylum-seekers to schedule appointments in advance, and a parole program for people from certain countries to apply—in limited numbers—for entry to the U.S. This article analyzes the limitations of these processes, and presents alternatives and ways to frame a truly just system.

## [A Mother, A Daughter, A Deadly Journey \(Podcast\)](#)

BY MICHAEL BARBARO  
THE NEW YORK TIMES, 1/20/23

This podcast follows a young child and her mother on their journey out of Venezuela and through the Darien Gap. The story—while distinct to the particular family profiled—is nonetheless similar to reports of the journey undertaken by so many of our guests in the past year.

## [Pope Tells Foreign Exploiters in Congo, "Hands Off Africa!"](#)

BY GERARD O'CONNELL  
AMERICA MAGAZINE, 1/31/23

Pope Francis visited the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan in late January. The Pope's remarks about a country's right to self-determination echo profoundly throughout our hemisphere. "[The Pope] called on other countries, both near and far, and multinational corporations to stop the economic exploitation of this country and the continent and urged, 'Hands off the Democratic Republic of the Congo! Hands off Africa! Stop choking Africa. It is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered.'"



# BETWEEN A FENCE AND A HARD PLACE

## The Human Cost of the Southern Border Wall



Around February 2021, Araceli\* fled her home, her family, and everything she knew in Ecuador to seek asylum in the United States, where her three US citizen sons live. Due to the implementation of Title 42 — a public health policy used during the pandemic to turn back asylum seekers who presented at the border — Araceli feared she would be denied the right to seek asylum. Instead, she sought help from a coyote to cross into the United States so she could seek asylum and reunite with her family.

At the wall, the coyote set up a hanging ladder that swung precariously when people started climbing it. Araceli managed to climb all the way up, but she struggled to get over the top. The people behind her and the coyote yelled at her to hurry. Araceli fell from the border wall at the highest point, thirty feet in the air — about the height of a telephone pole. She landed on the ground, instantly in tremendous pain, and could not get up. Another woman had also fallen and seemed to be very seriously hurt and unable to move. Araceli managed to call 911 on her cell phone, and eventually an ambulance and Border Patrol agents arrived and took her to an El Paso hospital. Araceli's injuries included multiple pelvic fractures, a right ankle fracture, fracture of the ulna in her right forearm, and PTSD symptoms including nightmares from the trauma. After three weeks in the hospital, ICE transferred her to a detention facility, where the cold cell aggravated and intensified her pain. Finally in March 2021, ICE released Araceli to Annunciation House. Araceli remained at Annunciation House for weeks until she was well enough to travel to reunite with her family sponsor, awaiting the outcome of her asylum case.

\*Pseudonym



## Constructing the modern border wall

The US-Mexican border wall is a painful and undeniable force in El Paso and other borderland communities: a scar in the earth, a separator of families, a symbol of xenophobia against our immigrant siblings. However, the wall as we now know it is a relatively modern development. Until the early 2000s, most border communities had only moderate fencing or simple mile-markers to denote the international boundary. This enabled people and wildlife to pass relatively freely and safely between countries.

The drastic shift toward looming steel barriers began after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Politicians on both sides of the aisle leveraged fears of terrorism to blame and demonize immigrants, culminating in the REAL ID Act of 2005. This legislation paved the way for building the modern-day border wall by giving the Secretary of Homeland Security unprecedented power to waive “all legal requirements” that might stand in the way of constructing roads or barriers along the border. The REAL ID Act was followed by the Secure Fence Act of 2006, which authorized and partially funded the construction of 700 miles of fencing along the Mexican border. From 2007 to 2015, Customs and Border Patrol spent \$2.3 billion to build up physical barriers. During this time, trade agreements ensured that capital and material goods continued to move freely across the border—but the movement of human beings became increasingly restricted.

Borderland communities predicted the harm the wall would cause. Rather than stopping or stemming migration, the wall simply pushed refugees into increasingly dangerous sections of desert and mountains. In one study measuring the impact of the Secure Fence Act, the ACLU found that a drop in the number of total apprehensions “masked a more than doubling of the increase of the likelihood of death, up from 42 deaths per 100,000 apprehensions to 96 deaths per 100,000.” In some sections of the border, the death rate increase was even more extreme: Tucson saw a fivefold increase, and Laredo’s death rate increased more than six-fold (from 48 to 326 deaths per 100,000 apprehensions, in 2006 and 2017 respectively).

Despite the border wall’s impact as a humanitarian and environmental disaster — and an astronomically expensive one at that — the idea has persisted in political spheres and in the mainstream media that a wall could deter migration if only it were taller and more substantial. From 2018 to 2019, the Trump Administration secured another \$1.3 billion in funding from Congress to build new or replacement walls at the southern border. In El Paso — as well as other areas including San Diego and the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona — this meant replacing existing border walls with taller, 30-foot steel bollard-type wall.

At Annunciation House, the new wall’s consequences were pronounced. No, our houses were not emptied because the wall deterred refugees from seeking asylum or convinced families to abandon reunification with their loved ones. Instead, we saw patterns of increasingly frequent and severe injuries among those who stayed in our houses. For example, there was Yesenia\*, a 20-year-old from Guatemala who hoped to study dance in the United States. She passed out after slipping and falling on the United States side from the 30-foot wall. After regaining consciousness, Yesenia was in such excruciating pain that she was certain she would die. Ingrid arrived at Annunciation House in a wheelchair with fractures in her spinal cord, both feet, and ankles, and struggled to sleep due to her pain and emotional trauma. There were Rocio\* and Pilar\*, who each fell from the wall (on separate occasions) as coyotes urged them over. They came to Annunciation House with debilitating pain from fractures in their feet and ankles. Over time, refugees in wheelchairs, crutches, casts, and braces became an increasingly present fixture in our houses.

\*Pseudonym

The border wall presents a danger to human life. The patterns we have witnessed at Annunciation House are mirrored in [reports](#) across the borderlands of an unprecedented increase in trauma from border wall falls, including refugees suffering broken legs, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injuries, miscarriages, and death. From 2021-22 alone, 20 Mexican nationals [died](#) while trying to cross the border, and nearly 250 others were injured.

## Title 42: Eliminating safe access to asylum compounds the dangers of migration

A border wall becomes especially lethal when there are few options other than to climb it or face the hazardous terrain around it. In the past three years, the unlawful implementation of Title 42 has created exactly this dilemma for refugees seeking asylum and family reunification in the United States.

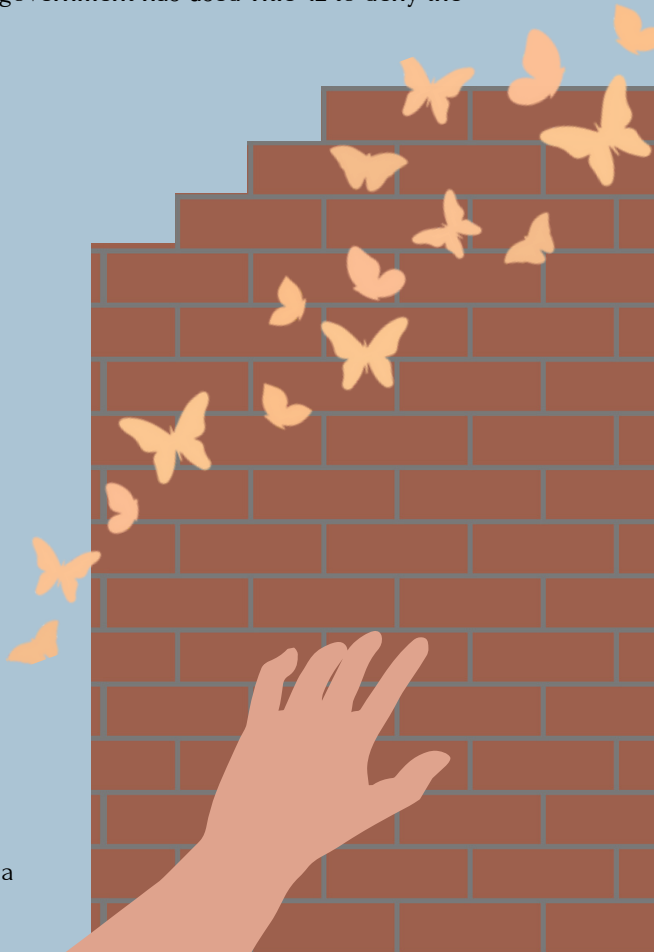
A rarely-used provision of the U.S. public health code, Title 42 gives the federal government the ability to take emergency action to keep communicable diseases out of the country. Already in search of new and creative ways to stem migration, the Trump administration weaponized Title 42 in March 2020 to refuse entry to all asylum seekers at the southern border (even as it down-played the seriousness of the pandemic in other contexts, rejected options such as masks and social distancing, and did not implement pandemic control measures for US citizens at land border crossings).

The fundamental right to seek asylum is enshrined in US and international law, and has been a cornerstone of US immigration policy since the end of World War II. Title 42 has dramatically interfered with that right. In El Paso, CBP officers station themselves mere footsteps over the international boundary on the Paso del Norte bridge, where day after day refugees approach them on the bridge seeking to set foot on US soil and ask for asylum. Instead, they are turned back to wait in indefinite limbo in Mexico. Since March 2020, the government has used Title 42 to deny the right to asylum [over 2.5 million times](#).

It is no wonder that refugees risk their lives crossing over the border wall — or the Rio Grande with its unpredictable currents, or the harsh desert — when the government has worked assiduously to eliminate safe and legal avenues to seek asylum. Decades of restrictive immigration policy have proven that walls and asylum bans do not stop migration, but merely force people to adopt increasingly dangerous and lethal measures to exercise their right to seek safety. In its support for policies based in fear and animosity toward refugees, the United States government created the conditions that led to the [deadliest year for migrants ever recorded](#). At Annunciation House, we gladly provide hospitality to the survivors of our broken immigration policy. However, we are disturbed by its increasingly severe consequences.

## Intersections of immigration and disability justice

Some refugees come to Annunciation House with injuries that may eventually heal with time and care, while others' bodies will be marked forever with the cost of seeking refuge in the United States. As we increasingly find ourselves accompanying refugees with serious and chronic injuries, we reflect on the intersections of immigration with disability justice. We recognize that current US immigration policies are a





force that creates new disabilities in those seeking asylum, both physically as well as mentally. A system that denies people safe and legal avenues to migrate forces refugees to take perilous routes and risk their bodily well-being for the chance to seek asylum. Some researchers have estimated that as many as 30% of refugees have a disability, injury or trauma from their journey. Once in the US, the immigration detention system often exacerbates physical and mental health disabilities, and even causes new violence against refugees including medical neglect, prolonged detention or solitary confinement.

At the same time, we are listening and learning from disability justice advocates about what solidarity and dignity looks like in the context of disability. Annunciation House has always affirmed the inherent dignity and worth of the human person, independent of that person's "utility" as a worker or producer. Our mission is to serve those whom society has left on the margins, those who find themselves excluded from most other systems of care and support. We have long been aware that here on the border, the poorest of the poor include undocumented migrants and refugees, who are turned away by many service agencies. Similarly, many people with disabilities find themselves unable to access resources in their communities, because those resources have not been built with them in mind. They are denied full participation in society, and the community is deprived of their insights and voices.

As we receive guests with injuries into our newly renovated building, we are reminded that disabilities themselves do not limit people from achieving their full potential. Rather, what can be limiting are the surrounding structures, unless they are built to accommodate all of us, with our varying needs and abilities. All of us benefit from increased inclusion: for example, the front-door ramp that permits wheelchair access to Annunciation House also allows an able-bodied guest with a baby to smoothly wheel out a stroller.

We are working to build accessibility and ensure that our houses of hospitality can accommodate diverse needs and bodies and provide safe, comfortable, dignified shelter to all people. We affirm the principle of interdependence — which acknowledges that our survival is bound up together. And we uplift the important contributions of disability justice advocates in unraveling racist and ableist systems, fighting to abolish immigration detention, and re-imagining an immigration system grounded in dignity, love, and full participation for all.\*

## A Path Forward

The southern border wall continues to impose incalculable harm on Borderlands communities and refugees seeking safety in the United States. At the same time, Title 42 has amplified the wall's harm by restricting safe and legal avenues to seek asylum. Whereas most pandemic-era measures have long been waning, both the Trump and Biden administrations have sought to entrench Title 42 as a permanent new hurdle to seeking asylum. As recently as



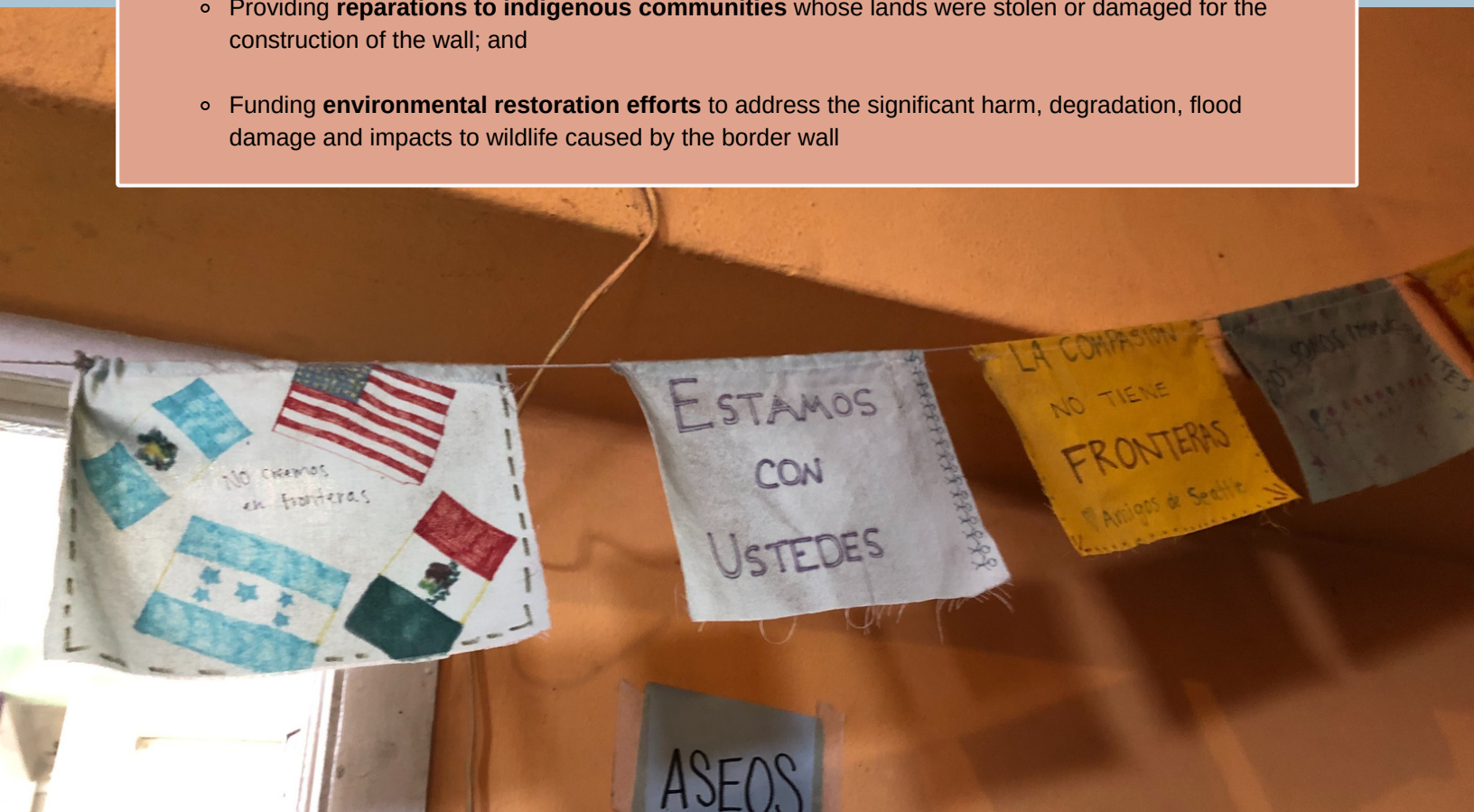
\*For more reading on disability justice and its intersections with immigration justice, we especially recommend: Eli Clare, Alice Wong, Mia Mingus, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Sandy Ho, and Gaelynn Lea



January 2022, following a federal court declaration that the current implementation of the law is unconstitutional, President Biden has sought to expand Title 42. The Biden Administration is also implementing or seeking to implement new hurdles for asylum seekers—many of which are reminiscent of the Trump administration's policies — such as requiring refugees to request an appointment in advance to be able to seek asylum in the US.

Our vision for a more just future is informed not only by our own experience providing hospitality to refugees at the border, but also by the perspectives of refugees, residents of the Borderlands, immigration lawyers and activists, environmental protectors, indigenous communities, and many more, who have written and spoken about the damage inflicted by Title 42 and the border wall. We deeply value the experiences of our allies in this shared work and their insights into how current policies impact their work, history, identities, and struggles. Accordingly, we add the insights we have gained from serving the poor in migration to this larger chorus and demand immediate change:

- We demand the **full rescission of Title 42** and **restoration of the right to seek asylum** for all; and
- We demand that the **remaining funds** appropriated for the border wall be **used to address harm** caused by the wall, including:
  - **Removing** the wall, or **replacing** the wall with border markers that enable safe and free migration and do not cause harm to humans, wildlife, or environment;
  - Providing **medical** and **mental health care** for individuals injured by the wall;
  - Providing **reparations to indigenous communities** whose lands were stolen or damaged for the construction of the wall; and
  - Funding **environmental restoration efforts** to address the significant harm, degradation, flood damage and impacts to wildlife caused by the border wall



# 2022 VOLUNTEERS: BY THE NUMBERS

Annunciation House was founded in 1976 by a small group of young adults who gathered with a common desire to experience the Gospel more deeply. A guiding principle was the determination that whatever was done, it would have to be in solidarity with the poor. The lifestyle would be simple and lived in community. Any work or service would be offered freely. Those accepting this journey would be volunteers, receiving no pay or wages.

Over 45 years, Annunciation House has never wavered on our commitment to this principle. Our diverse and passionate community of volunteers lays the groundwork for all that we do. Our volunteers have been more important than ever in the past years as we have worked to provide shelter and stability throughout a global pandemic and the tumultuous effects of Title 42. Some highlights of our beloved volunteer community include:

## Long-Term & Summer Volunteers

**21**

# of long-term and summer volunteers who sustained our work from Nov. 2021-2022, living full-time in our houses in radical hospitality

**14**

volunteers were long-term volunteers, meaning they committed to a full-year of service with Annunciation House

**5**

stayed longer than their year-long commitment (or are planning to)!

**7**

volunteers were summer volunteers. This is about average over the past decade - except for 2019, when we hosted 19!

**10 & 7**

# of years of service of our longest-serving volunteers, Mary Bull (10 years), and Sr. Bea (7 years)

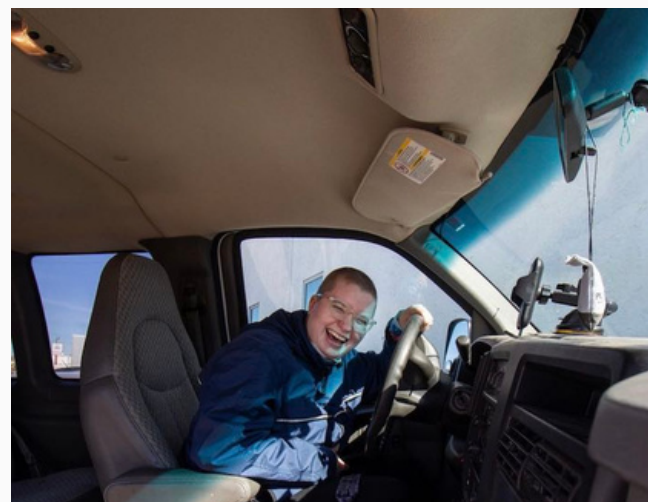
**19 - 80**

the age range of our volunteers! One-quarter are over 60; most of the others are between 20 and 35 years old

Volunteers have come from all over the United States, including Michigan, New York, Louisiana, and California, as well as from beyond the U.S., including England, Ireland, and Mexico



Long-term vols Mignon & Sr. Bea (above) and Lillian (below).  
Photo by volunteer Emma Brown, @instagramdmbrown





## Short-Term Volunteers

150+

# of short-term volunteers who worked with us from Nov 2021-2022. Our short-term volunteers came from across the country, as well as Mexico and England

how long is "short-term"?

85 vols

2 wks

20+ vols

3-4 wks

20+ vols

5-12 wks

20

are people who have previously served as short-term volunteers (returning for a second, third, or even fourth time!)

~12

are former long-term volunteers who came back to serve again

## Community Volunteers

~50

# of community volunteers who supported our mission across all our sites in 2022. Most of these volunteers are from El Paso, though some are from Anthony and Las Cruces, NM.

Three community volunteers at Annunciation House have been doing regular shifts at the house for over a year; two community volunteers at Casa Vides have been doing shifts for over two years.

Community volunteers Sister Mary Peter and Barbara (left and center); short-term volunteer Sister Dani (right). Photos by volunteer Emma Brown, @instagrandmabrown.





## Mary Bull: Celebrating a Decade of Service at Annunciation House



In 2022, Mary Bull completed her tenth year of volunteer service with Annunciation House, where she arrived in 2012 from Saginaw, Michigan. She is our longest-serving volunteer! We are profoundly grateful for Mary's commitment, leadership, and depth of knowledge about many things: house operations, the evolving political and humanitarian situation at the border, Annunciation House history, and coordinating the volunteer community, to name just several.

Mary has worked with thousands of volunteers from around the region, country, and beyond as they serve at Annunciation House, as well as tens of thousands of guests from every continent except Australia and Antarctica. Mary has served at Annunciation House, Casa Anunciación in Juárez while that was open during the pandemic, and also many of the hotels that we have operated. To hear more about Mary's journey to El Paso, as well as what motivates her, check out [this podcast interview](#) on the Jesuit Post.


Mary has a young nephew she enjoys visiting when she is not at Annunciation House, as well as a cat named Patricio. Thank you, Mary, for all you do, and the countless ways you serve our guests and live out the mission of Annunciation House every day.



## Volunteer Reflection: "Suffering & Joy" by Michael Brennan

*Hope is hearing the music of the future. Faith is to dance to it. – Rubem Alves*

It took us all by surprise. After wiping down the breakfast tables and sweeping the floor, an upbeat salsa song came on the music speaker. Immediately, eight Cuban men started giddily and skillfully dancing together, and provided dance lessons to the Venezuelans and the volunteers. It was a spontaneous eruption of joy amidst the suffering, waiting, and uncertainty of the journey.



My wife, Cata, and I are spending a week in El Paso helping to translate political asylum applications for Venezuelan refugees. We are immersed in intimate stories of personal persecution, fear, and the grief of having to flee one's homeland. People entrust to us their struggles and sufferings. Through it all, the bedrock belief is hope for a better future.

Our time in El Paso put faces and names on the data, narratives to the numbers. . . to tell the stories of the statistics. (However, to protect the people, the stories that follow are composites not tied to any one individual, and names are pseudonyms.)

**Emmanuel** is a 16-year-old Haitian young man that traveled with his family from Chile to the border. It took them 3 months of riding buses and walking through the muddy jungle separating Columbia from Panama to get to El Paso. Crossing the Darien Gap required eight days and nights of walking. Emmanuel described, through tears, that the trail through the jungle is strewn with the dead bodies of refugees who collapsed and died. In his words, "it was so hard to keep breathing, and to keep walking."

**Luis and Carmen** fled Venezuela and crossed that same jungle carrying their 2-month-old baby. Luis was drafted into the Venezuelan military and fled for his life when he was ordered to assassinate individuals opposed to the government. "I couldn't do that . . . someday, I will face my God and have to answer for what I have done with my life."

**Laura** from Peru is a painter in her 50s. She would paint pastoral scenes of the Andes mountains and sell them to tourists on the streets of the capital to support herself. With the pandemic, the tourists stopped coming, and Laura couldn't support herself. She ventured north to live with family in the U.S. The smugglers provided a ladder for her to scale the border wall, but once she got to the top, they took the ladder away. Laura lost her balance and fell, fracturing her spine, pelvis, and both legs. "At first, I just wanted to be dead. My God, why didn't you let me die? But now that I am healing, I give thanks to God for my life, and for hope."

**Maria** fears persecution in Venezuela for having attended an anti-government protest. "The government and their armed forces – "Los Colectivos" – were taking all the international food donations for themselves. They were meant for the people, not for the rich and powerful."

Our lives are blessed by the opportunity to share a thin slice of life with the poor in migration. They struggle and hope, despair and dance, and through it all, they are grateful for every small act of kindness.

With the other volunteers, we start every day with a time of reflection. Most often, we rededicate ourselves to being "present to the guests, in a loving and joyful way." Every day there are moments of tears, joy, and unexpected grace. As Easter approaches, we give thanks for all the blessings in our lives, and for the privilege of being able to accompany – for a brief time – our brothers and sisters in migration.

~Cata y Miguel

# Support Our Work

Annunciation House could not run without the generosity of our community, near and far. Our houses are sustained totally by the spontaneous and free contributions of individuals, groups and faith communities. We have no permanent funding sources, and we have never accepted government funding.

## Volunteer

Annunciation House is eagerly seeking long-term (one year or more) and short-term volunteers (two weeks or more) to assist with providing hospitality to migrants and refugees in El Paso, TX. We welcome both local volunteers from El Paso/Juarez/Las Cruces, and out-of-towners who can commit to at least two weeks. Please visit our [website](#) for more information!

## Donate

At this time, we primarily request monetary donations. Unrestricted monetary donations enable Annunciation House to respond quickly and nimbly to ever-changing needs at the border, purchase the supplies our guests need the most, and limit waste.

Annunciation House is a 501(c)3 organization; all donations are tax-deductible. Financial donations can be made online with a credit card through [this PayPal site](#). Checks made out to Annunciation House can be mailed to:

**Annunciation House**  
**P.O. Box 11189**  
**El Paso, TX 79995-1189**

## Special Call for Former BAE Coordinators

Did you previously volunteer as a BAE Coordinator with Annunciation House? Please reach out! Our Border Awareness Experience program was deeply impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and by the shifting landscape of volunteer capacity. As we revamp our educational programming, we are interested in speaking with former BAE Coordinators about opportunities to re-engage with this work. Please contact us at [volunteercoordinator@annunciationhouse.org](mailto:volunteercoordinator@annunciationhouse.org).

## Stay Tuned: VOV 2023

For twenty years, Annunciation House has issued an annual Voice of the Voiceless Award recognizing the courageous people who accept the call to work, struggle, and witness on behalf of the oppressed poor. Through their work and actions, these individuals give voice to the poor and their profound yearning to be heard and freed.

Our Voice of the Voiceless event has been paused for the last two years as we adjusted to new realities of quarantine and social-distancing under Covid-19. We are delighted to announce its return in 2023! Stay tuned for more details, and consider joining us in El Paso this year to honor the value of these voices that offer a guiding path of light in times of darkness.





# ANNUNCIATION HOUSE

[www.annunciationhouse.org](http://www.annunciationhouse.org)

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This newsletter was entirely produced by volunteers of Annunciation House. Members of the Board of Directors' Education and Advocacy Committee Delia Gomez, Katie Sharar, and Maria Thomson developed the pieces and formatted the newsletter. Additional members of the Board supported the writing and helped to edit the newsletter. Jennifer Macias, Gerardo Guemez, Maria (Cari) Garriga, and Florence Dwyer assisted in translating all pieces into Spanish to ensure that the newsletter is also accessible to refugees and residents of the Borderlands. Long-term volunteer Emma Brown provided photos of the volunteer community. Thank you to all!