



SEPTEMBER 2026

ANNUNCIATION HOUSE NEWSLETTER

WE THE PEOPLE

In May 2026, Annunciation House celebrated our 16th annual Voice of the Voiceless (VOV) celebration. Since its inception, Voice of the Voiceless has been an important opportunity to gather our community near and far, pause, reflect, and acknowledge the people that continue to inspire us.

Though the VOV celebration was on hiatus for several years, Annunciation House's work has never stopped. At times over the past years the flow of refugees to our houses has been very great; at other times, it slowed due to increased detention and turnbacks. No matter the circumstances, we continue to welcome the stranger and our doors remain open. However, even as our houses and communities are ready to receive the refugee and provide hospitality, we bear witness to the dramatic expansion of detention infrastructure in El Paso and throughout the United States. Currently, the total detention capacity of the Department of Homeland Security in El Paso is close to 8,000 beds, with plans underway to open an even larger facility in Socorro. At this moment, local communities are valiantly working to prevent this from happening.

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The vast majority of those in detention across the United States have no criminal record and have lived here for years, forming deep community ties as parents, neighbors, spouses, business owners, and employees. Nevertheless, since January 2025 nearly 600,000 immigrants and refugees have been booked into detention, many of whom were denied even the mere opportunity to seek release on bond. This policy has been found illegal by federal judges across the United States through thousands of habeas corpus petitions. When Operation Metro unfolded this past winter, hundreds of refugees detained in Minneapolis were transferred to the Camp East Montana facility in El Paso within hours of their arrest, separated from their homes, families, and attorneys and placed on a “rocket docket” of detained deportation proceedings. Following federal orders declaring such detentions illegal, Annunciation House received over 500 of these individuals upon their release from ICE custody, helping them return to the families they had been unjustly torn away from.

In just the months of April and May 2026, we received 244 refugees in our houses, released from three local detention facilities. We asked these individuals how long they had been detained, with answers varying from a couple of months to years. Cumulatively, these 244 individuals had been in detention for 44,909 days, or 123 years. Consider the potential of 123 years taken from our communities, families, and economies, just for these 224 refugees. Now, consider again the cost for the roughly 600,000 human beings who have been detained throughout the United States.

There is another way, and we know there are more people who are ready to welcome the stranger and provide hospitality rather than putting families striving for safety and opportunity in jails. Despite the policies of this moment, El Paso and beyond are filled with people who believe in the fundamental humanity and value of immigrants. Communities have come together in ways big and small to protect their neighbors and extend compassion to the vulnerable. In times of great activity and need at our houses, we have been inspired by the volunteers who come out of the woodwork to serve, staffing hospitality sites at churches and community centers when our houses have overflowed. On any given day that a bus arrived to a hospitality site bringing refugees released from detention, parishoners could be found rushing about to make sure that cots were ready with linens, care packages were lined up, and a warm meal was prepared to welcome them as they got off the bus. It was you, the people of our communities, who were there to welcome them. You who stepped up to say, *estoy listo*. You who affirmed, we are all created in God’s image.

The theme of the 2026 Voice of the Voiceless celebration was “We the People,” as a reminder that we all bear the responsibility to care for one another. In this newsletter, we invite you to learn more about the people who make up our “we”: our volunteers, the refugees who bless us with their presence and stories, and the community members and leaders who never give up *la lucha*.

2026 Voice of the Voiceless Awards

2026 Voice of the Voiceless Award: Congresswoman Veronica Escobar



The 2026 Voice of the Voiceless recipient is, in more ways than one, a voice calling out in the desert. Congresswoman Veronica Escobar has represented Texas's 16th Congressional district since 2019. She was the first woman elected to this seat and the first of two Latinas from Texas to serve in Congress. Before that, Ms. Escobar served as El Paso County Commissioner, then County Judge. As our representative, she has been a fierce advocate both for the people of El Paso and for the migrants and refugees who have arrived in great numbers in our city. Representative Escobar has spoken

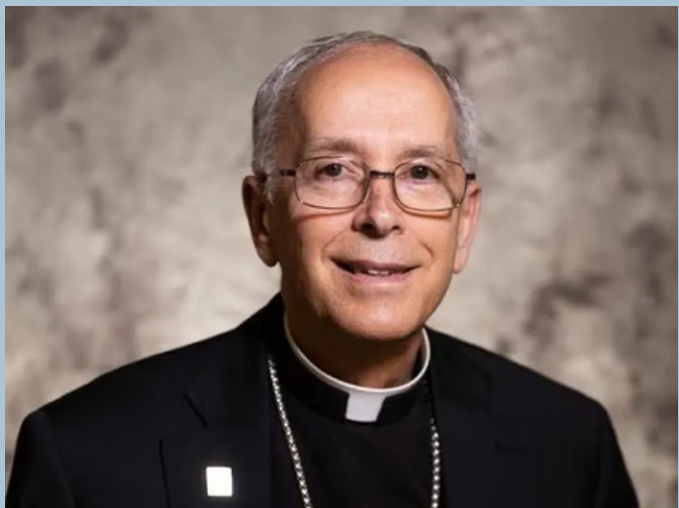
out strongly against policies that demonize and harm our immigrant neighbors, recognizing that these harsh measures also fail to serve the needs of our interconnected border community. In 2018 she helped lead protests against the separation of migrant families. She then introduced legislation to defund the "Migrant Protection Protocols," which forced asylum seekers to wait in often dangerous conditions in Mexico.

Last summer, she co-introduced the Dignity Act, a bipartisan immigration reform bill that would improve our asylum system and create legal status for undocumented immigrants already living in the US. And she has called urgently for the closure of Camp East Montana, where immigrants have been detained under inhumane conditions.

Representative Escobar is a proud third generation El Pasoan. She attended Loretto Academy and studied at the University of Texas at El Paso, and taught English and Chicano literature at both UTEP and El Paso Community College. Her devotion to this region is evident in the multiple congressional delegations that she has brought to the border, telling her colleagues, "We are being painted as a dangerous place meant to be controlled, when what we see is a place of complexity and beauty."

For her outspoken dedication to the just treatment of migrants and refugees, for her unceasing effort to hold accountable those who would mistreat refugees in detention, for her sponsorship of just immigration reform legislation, for her efforts to seek funding for humanitarian organizations that serve refugees, and for her defense of those same organizations when they are threatened by the government, the Board of Directors of Annunciation House presents its 2026 Voice of the Voiceless award to Representative Veronica Escobar.

2026 Teacher of Justice Award: Bishop Mark Seitz



“The way of love,” says Bishop Mark Seitz, “cannot be hidden under a bushel basket. It must be embodied, incarnate, and public.” Such is the path Bishop Seitz has forged and followed during his 13 years leading the Catholic Diocese of El Paso, as recent former Chair and current member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration Committee, and in prior years of Catholic leadership, teaching, and scholarship throughout Texas and the country. While a pastor in Dallas in 2009, he donated a kidney to an ailing parishioner—an act exemplary of his commitment, in body and spirit, to the

suffering among his flock. As a borderland Bishop, he loves—and unrelentingly defends—the “culture of encounter” engendered by embracing the enriching power of migration.

Bishop Seitz was instrumental to the creation of a rare statement on migration, passed nearly unanimously at the U.S. bishops’ annual conference last November. The pastoral message condemned the “indiscriminate mass deportation,” “dehumanizing rhetoric and violence,” “vilification of immigrants,” stripping of protective statuses, separation of families, threats of arrests in houses of worship and other sensitive locations, and other immigration enforcement actions wreaking a “climate of fear and anxiety” among the people in their pews and communities. Bishop Seitz joined 17 other bishops and archbishops from the border region in another statement, in February of this year, urging the federal government to make policy changes and stop actions that undermine the Constitutional right to due process. Bishop Seitz’s issuance of numerous pastoral letters on migration, including one this March on the “grave moral evil” of mass detention and mass deportation, demonstrate his conviction that in every parish there should be “affirmative messages of solidarity and truth coming from our pulpits.”

But Bishop Seitz is not one to stay behind the pulpit. Rather, he has mourned and celebrated with the guests of Annunciation House. He has accompanied asylum seekers across the Paso Del Norte bridge. He has activated diocesan facilities and churches in El Paso to be hospitality sites for newly arrived immigrants, and defended the faith-based and other civil-society organizations fundamental to democratic life. He has clamored for every diocese to offer know-your-rights education and rally legal services for immigrants, and he calls for every person to be personally engaged with the lives of the poor and vulnerable.

For his weighty words, for his mobilization of Catholic leaders to call out the morally indefensible and protect the vulnerable, for his authentic witness, and because (as Pope Paul VI famously said) people pay attention to teachers who are witnesses, the Board of Directors of Annunciation House presents Bishop Mark Seitz with the 2026 Teacher of Justice Award.

2026 Witness on the Border Award: Cristina Coronado



The Witness on the Border recognition affirms the work of groups and individuals in our borderlands who are responding to the signs of the times with integrity, courage, and perseverance. These honorees bear witness to the reality of the poor in migration often at significant personal risk or cost. For being an uncompromising voice for justice, a fearless advocate for migrants and refugees, and a living witness of compassion, faith, and solidarity on the border, the 2026 Witness on the Border Award is proudly presented to Cristina Coronado.

Cristina is a person of great compassion. When she sees injustice or suffering, she doesn't turn away. She gets involved. She once said, "How can I go home to sleep in a warm bed, when I know there are migrant families and their children, with nothing to eat and sleeping on the street?" So, she began going out at night with food and blankets. While many hid behind Covid restrictions, Cristina served.

A person with the courage of her convictions, seeing police harassing migrants, she approaches calmly and asks: "Why are you detaining these migrants?" The police respond: "It's none of your business. We can arrest you!" She stays. The police leave. The abused refugees weep, telling Cristina that the police stole their money and took their documents. Listening, she encourages them, gives them her cell phone number, and answers when they call. Years later, the migrants are still calling. Haitians in Miami call to tell Mami Cris, the name she is now called, "you have a new granddaughter. Look, here is a picture of the new baby born in the USA". They keep in touch with her because she stayed close to them when they were in need.

A reporter wrote an article about the extortion and abuse that migrants around the Cathedral plaza area suffer. The day the article was published resulted in two days of invasions and harassment inside the Columban Migrant Welcome Center. Serious threats were made against Cristina's health and well-being. She and the Cathedral pastor, Fr. Hayen, met with the City's Chief of Security who apologized and changed all the officers in the Plaza area. Cristina advocates with her flesh and blood; her presence, her prophetic voice. And the migrants and refugees keep coming because it is their sanctuary and place of repose in a hostile city.

Cristina has a special access to power: Her constant and profound faith in the God who called her to this work. She says, "I keep my eyes fixed on Jesus and my feet firmly planted on the ground, and God takes care of everything else." She is a Witness on the Border.



Thank you to all who volunteered or joined us for the 2026 Voice of the Voiceless celebration!

Photos by Annunciation House volunteer Emma Brown



ON RELEASE FROM DETENTION

Survey results from Annunciation House guests

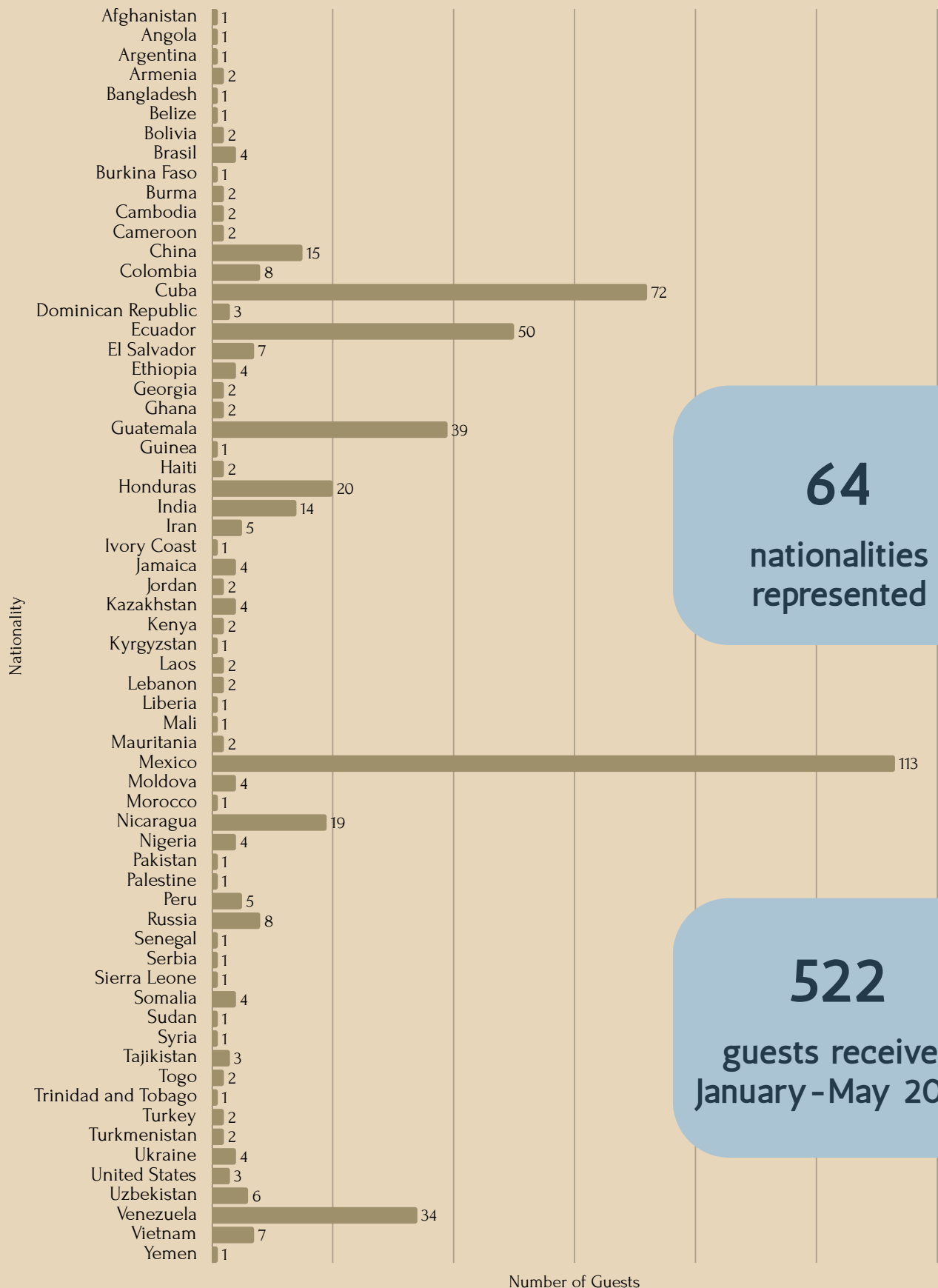
With unprecedented funding to expand detentions and deportation throughout the United States, hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees have been torn from their families and homes. Upon detention, they are frequently transferred to distant detention facilities across the United States, sometimes over and over, creating chaos and confusion. Due to the rapid injection of funding for enforcement, many detention centers have been hastily constructed—such as Camp East Montana in El Paso, a soft-sided tarp structure, where detainees report desert dust, wind, and rain causing respiratory issues, poor access to legal calls, and frozen or rancid food.

Annunciation House bears witness to those suffering in detention, and we open our doors to those who are granted release. For over a decade, we have worked with immigration authorities to receive refugees released from detention when facilities overflowed, judges ordered liberty, or officers simply exercised humanity in recognizing that detention of an asylum seeker was not necessary. As immigration enforcement expands throughout the interior, this work has connected us to communities throughout the United States. In the winter and spring of 2026, Operation Metro in Minneapolis resulted in thousands of refugees being detained in Minnesota and transferred to Texas, many of whom were released to Annunciation House on orders of habeas corpus. It was a privilege to receive them, hear their stories, and offer them the hospitality they were always due.

Through our work and the generosity of our communities, we affirm that a more humane alternative to detention exists.

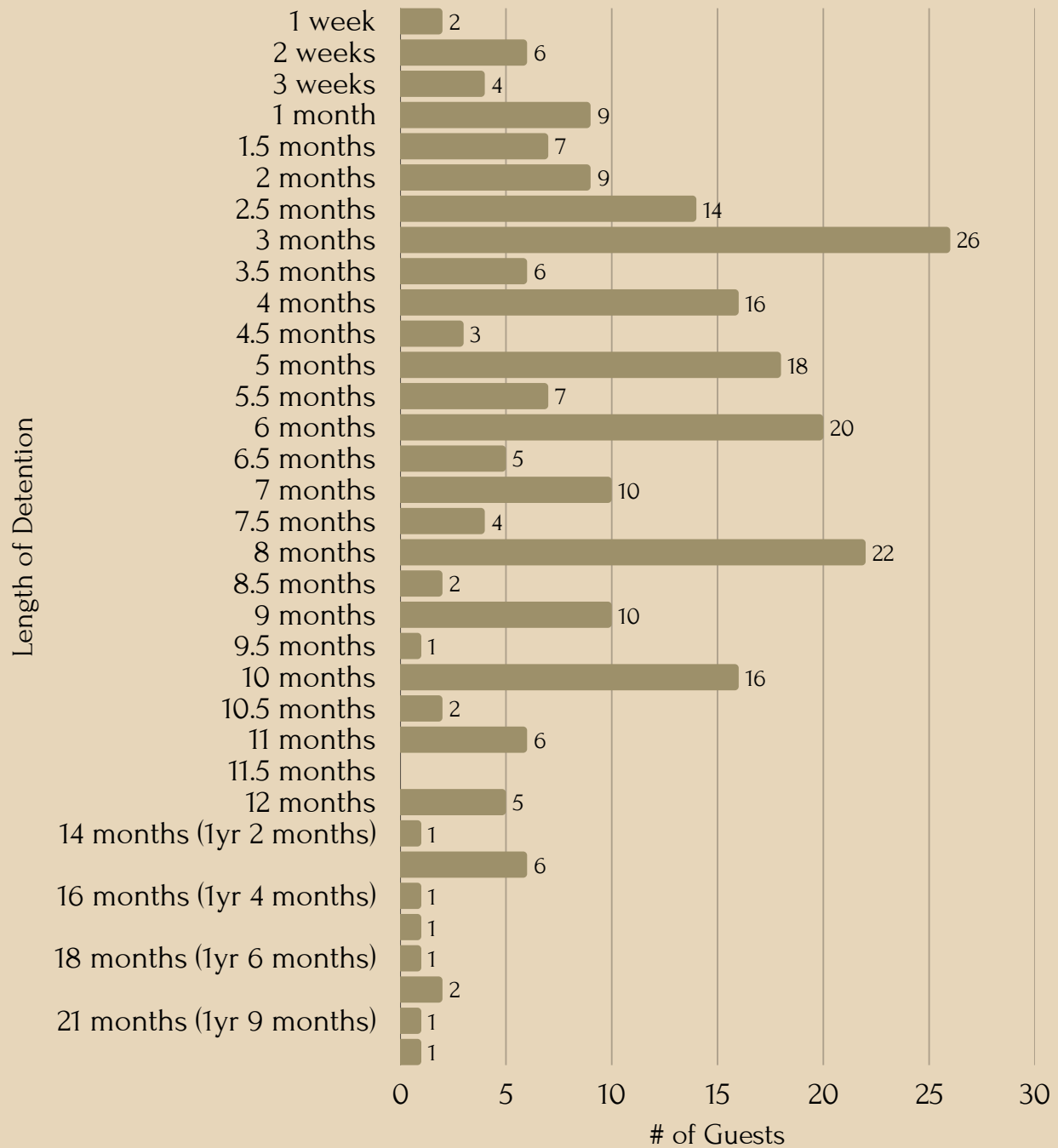
Annunciation House Guests by Nationality (Detention Release)

January - May 2026



Length of detention

Annunciation House Guests, April-May 2026

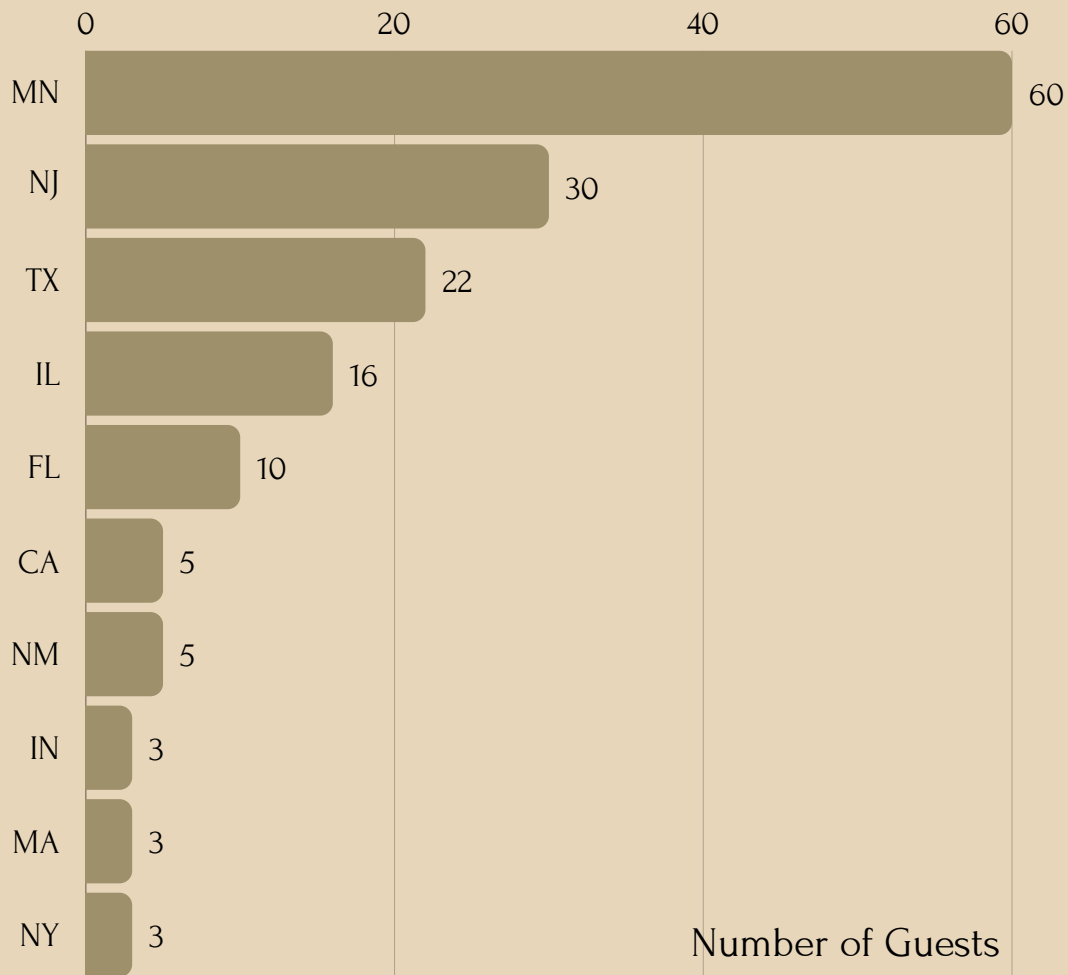


244
guests released from
detention

~ 44,909 days
(123 years)
cumulative time
in detention

184 days
(6 months)
average length of
detention

State where guest was apprehended (May 2026)



136 guests reported release on bond from January to May 2026

\$590,000

cumulative amount
paid in bond

~\$4,500

average bond
reported

\$15,000

highest bond
reported

Beyond Numbers

Excerpted notes from guests released from detention

"Already has UVISA approved. Told the guards that he is diabetic but didn't get any medicine until the final couple of days in detention"

"Could not sleep. Women crying."

"was picked up during an encounter with police, when they called ICE. It took 7 days for him to see a doctor after he asked for medical attention. Many people had COVID or flu, which went unaddressed. He lost 30 pounds. It was always cold inside. He never had any issues with the guards. During his time in detention, he heard of 3 deaths due to medical negligence."

"they arrested him in a forceful manner. they broke his car window and threw him on the ground."

"Apprehended in Walmart, took her groceries and \$180."

"Also spent about 12 hours in center in Louisiana. After his 12 days at Camp East [Montana], he was told he was to be deported. He told them the judge had approved him asking for asylum, but they didn't listen. So they transferred him to Los Fresnos and then to Louisiana, to be deported. He was put on the plane to Ecuador and when he arrived to Ecuador they realized he shouldn't have been deported and so they sent him back to Louisiana and then to [Camp] East Montana. He reports that the cleanliness in the bathrooms was extremely bad and he got athletes foot. There was a lot of dust on the doors, tables, and beds."

"Verbally assaulted by guards. Was hospitalized due to fainting. Baby is underweight."

"They arrested him while he was paying rent - the landlord called ICE on him. [An] organization for migrants in Chicago helped get him a lawyer."

"applied for asylum in 2022. was apprehended by being pulled over by the police who said his lights weren't on (it wasn't dark) and they called ICE. He felt targetted and that they were waiting for him to leave work. It was too cold in detention and for the food he was just grateful to be fed. He was released after the judge saw he owns his own business, paid his taxes, and has consistent work. says he won his asylum case two weeks ago."

Ritual

By Katherine Marshall (Annunciation House volunteer, summer 2025)

The biggest pots are stacked at the back of the shelf.
An empty house still can't clean itself.
A fridge of leftovers to empty and some bathrooms to clean,
It is a gift to be devoted to this practiced routine.

Some mornings when I conjure the energy to rise early,
I climb to the roof and sit for an hour.
Looking out at the Sun City,
A pretty skyline interrupted by a surveillance tower.

The longest weapon in the world cuts through this land
Like barbed wire through a little girl's hand.
Broken bones, missing toes
The desaparecidos whose whereabouts God only knows.

People walk the Earth after the fall
With bodies forever marked by the vicious border wall.
How many victims will satisfy
The ceaseless thirst for more to die.

In your quiet moments,
In your dinner prayers,
In your walks to school,
Amidst your daily cares,

Turn your mind's eye to the border wall,
The longest weapon with the deadly fall,
And remember that to believe in Christ
Is to recognize true sacrifice.

Love your neighbor
Kiss their cheek
Welcome in the stranger
Give them something to eat.

Volunteer Reflection: “PRESENTE”

Carol Zuccarino

The last 5 years have found me serving as a Volunteer at Annunciation House (AH). I arrived, as most of us do, with a desire to be helpful and to understand better the plight of our sisters and brothers arriving at our Southern Border seeking asylum. I was not disappointed by either intention. There has always been plenty to do to welcome the stranger, to offer the graciousness of good food, a comfortable bed, hot showers and willing accompaniment and support. AH volunteers take 8-hour shifts and do everything necessary to assist the newly arrived immigrant to feel safe and to contact the family or sponsor. The guest remains with us until a flight is booked or tickets are in hand for bus or train. They then receive a big hug, a travel bag of nourishment and are off to the new adventure of settling in the USA.

I stayed for 2 years during the COVID epidemic, not wanting to return to the East Coast while the danger of infection was imminent. During this time, I learned about the long and difficult progression of our guests coming North, through the Darien Gap, passing dangerous country borders, climbing the Bestia train. I heard stories of abuse, of capture, and extortion. Children were separated from their parents, women from their partners while enduring hunger, sickness, climate changes and all the time suffering fear and uncertainty. Our guests talked of the coyotes rounding up groups from small villages and holding them in stash houses; of how they were led up the wall on rope ladders and told to slide down a steel post 40 feet to the ground. Many of the guests come from the hospital where they have been treated for orthopedic injuries, cracked ribs and vertebrae, and barb-wire wounds. We welcome and care for them all. It is with gratitude and humility that I return again each year; for me, accompanying these sisters and brothers in migration is the best way to spend my years in “transition.” I am 81, thankfully I am in good health, can give and take directions, speak Spanish well enough, and am having a meaningful time while I am doing a work of service.

So, at Annunciation House we welcome the migrants and help them to move on to their future experience.

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As a conclusion to my service this May (I return home each summer to be with my children, grands and siblings), I participated along with 7 others from El Paso in the 75-mile hike called The Migrant Trail. Forty-five of us left Sasabe, Arizona and walked to Tucson, camping in the desert at night for a week. We were well prepared with good shoes, sun protection and plenty of water. We had support vehicles carrying our camping equipment, food, and latrines, and even a vehicle to give a lift to anyone who was overcome by the heat or had extensive blisters!

Each of us carried a wooden cross with a name of a person who went lost or was unaccounted for this past year. From January to May, 154 migrants were recorded “perished” in the desert in which we walked. Each time we came to a resting spot we held the cross, repeated the name and called out “PRESENTE”. Barbara Sostaita, in her book Sanctuary.

By reciting the name of the dead, each followed by the word “presente” the living affirm that their comrades are still present in the struggle, still engaged in the present. With “Presente” we welcome the dead to stir us into action.”

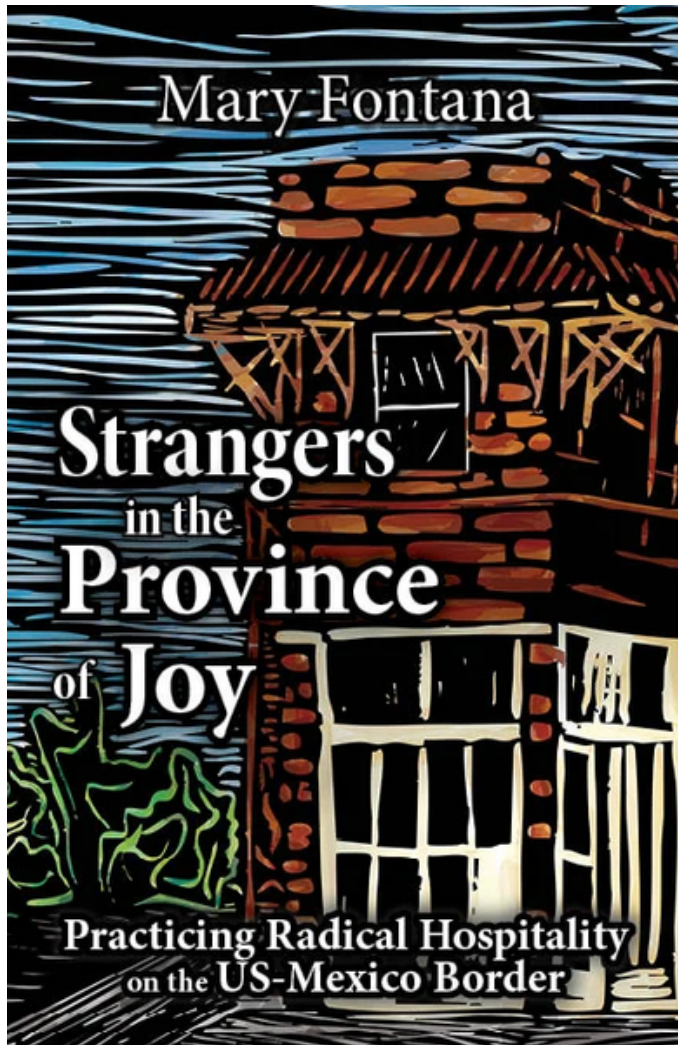
Everywhere, describes this practice as “a Latin American tradition of not only remembering, but resurrecting those disappeared and murdered by authoritarian regimes. By reciting the name of the dead, each followed by the word “presente,” the living affirm that their comrades are still present in the struggle, still engaged in the present. With “Presente” we welcome the dead to stir us into action.”

This experience of walking, remembering, being silent in the middle of the high desert and trying to imagine the huge undertaking this path is for all those in migration was quite awesome. Being together with like minded hikers, all of the same persuasion, allowed me to hope with a new fervor that change can come. That being truthful to the plight of those in migration, actually walking the walk, enables me to testify honestly as to what our government is allowing to occur and even forcing those who seek asylum to suffer by refusing to allow legal entry to our country.

I’m on the East Coast now. I am ready to open the conversation and listen to people who want to dialogue. I think I have come full circle from welcoming the migrant, to encountering their remains, and moving forward as an advocate for immigration reform. I have more patience and a new sense of purpose to bring the plight of the migrating population into the discussion. Wish me luck!

Book Announcement

Strangers in the Province of Joy: Practicing Radical Hospitality on the US-Mexico Border



From the Publisher: *"This is the story of America writ small, of a nation founded by immigrants and its shifting, oft-contradictory attitudes toward immigration. This compelling account from the US-Mexico border cuts through polarized debates on immigration with the inspiring example of one community's commitment to radical hospitality. Annunciation House is a small, volunteer-run nonprofit in the border city of El Paso, Texas. Over the last half-century it has welcomed over half a million migrants and refugees, from Central Americans fleeing death squads in the 1980's to migrant families separated at the border in 2018. In this powerful narrative history, author and volunteer Mary Fontana recounts the story of Annunciation House through the voices of the guests and volunteers who have passed through its doors. Through their individual journeys, she also illustrates the complex forces that drive migration across the Americas. This richly drawn, deeply human narrative from the front lines of migration will challenge readers to explore the borders in their own hearts."*

Available for purchase from publisher [Orbis Books](#) and wherever books are sold

For half a century, Annunciation House in El Paso has been a rare beacon of hope in an increasingly dysfunctional immigration system in the United States. In her new book, Mary Fontana provides the first detailed history of Annunciation House, documenting how volunteers motivated by faith provided "radical hospitality" to hundreds of thousands of migrants fleeing poverty and persecution.

-Robert Moore, El Paso journalist

Register to Vote

ELECTION DAY: November 3, 2026

YOU can make a difference! Register and make a plan to vote this November to make sure your voice is heard.

Texas law requires eligible voters to register by the 30th day before Election Day. **The Texas voter registration deadline for the November 3, 2026 election is October 5, 2026.**

You must be a U.S. citizen to vote. For more information about voter registration and requirements, visit:

<https://www.vote.org/register-to-vote/texas/>

Save the Date

A-HOUSE 50th ANNIVERSARY: February 3, 2028

On February 3, 2028, Annunciation House will celebrate our 50th anniversary of providing hospitality to the poor in migration and bearing witness at the border. We are in the early stages of planning a special celebration of our history, impact, and faith, and recognizing the innumerable guests, volunteers, and community members who are the lifeblood of our work.

We particularly hope to gather those who have volunteered at Annunciation House over this 50-year history. **If you are a former volunteer, please consider saving this date and joining us to celebrate in February 2028.** More details to come.

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.

Volunteer

Annunciation House is run by volunteers who commit to an experience of transformative service and solidarity. Some of our volunteers are local community members, while others come for a time to both live and work in our houses of hospitality. Volunteers form a close-knit community: besides the common ground of living and working together, they meet every morning for reflection; take time off together each month to relax and have fun; and often form friendships that last for life.

Annunciation House is eagerly seeking long-term (one year or more) and short-term (two weeks or more) volunteers 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](#) or by [Venmo](#) (@AnnunciationHouse).

Checks made out to Annunciation House can be mailed to:

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



ANNUNCIATION HOUSE

www.annunciationhouse.org