

*From the Manager...*



Dear Mission Friends:

A new year inspires a sense of hope in most of us, but for those living in poverty, persecution or constant fear, hope is an illusion, one, however, to which they must cling for dear life.



*Bro. Pascuale supervising breakfast before the migrants leave to find work.*

As you recall from previous issues, the friars of the Dominican Province of Mexico, in collaboration with our Western Dominican Province and our Mission Office, in June 2006, assumed the responsibility of ministering to migrants seeking shelter at *Casa del Migrante*. The *Casa* provides its continuous flow of migrants with two meals a day, clean beds, a sink in which to hand wash their clothes, personal hygiene products, preventative medical attention, and social and spiritual support. The average stay is three to five days, just long enough to earn what it will take to get back to their families.

When Fr. Martin suggested Paul Loscavio, our grant writer/photographer, and I visit the *Casa* to observe and report on its daily operations, quite wisely, as we were to learn, he did not mention much about the city around *Casa del Migrante*.

I'd done some quick research and learned that Ciudad Juarez is a non-descript industrial city of 2 million, just across the border from El Paso, Texas. But while crossing the border into Ciudad Juarez after being picked up from the airport by Brother Pascuale Manalio-Passarelli, O.P., our province's representative at the *Casa*, I noticed tanks to each side of our



*Manuel unloading some donated fruit.*

car, jammed with machine gun-toting soldiers in camouflage. *Fray Pascualito* (Bro. Pascuale) explained that 2,000 troops from the Mexican army had been called in to patrol, since 900 of the city's policemen had resigned or been fired this year, many due to cooperation with drug traffickers. He added that drug violence in the city has been spiraling out of control; that more than 1,000 people have been killed just this year, 219 in August alone; that thousands have been kidnapped and held for ransom; and that 2500 had recently been laid off from their jobs in the city's *maquiladoras* (U.S. owned factories).

At the end of a dirt road we had to stop while Manuel, our driver and indispensable jack-of-all-trades at the *Casa*, got out to unlock and then again to lock the chain-link gate to the compound. Thereafter every door we entered had to be unlocked and every window was armed with iron bars.



*Wall-to-wall beds in the women's dorm.*

*"Welcome, relax, and make yourselves at home,"* said *Fray Pascualito*. It was late morning, a quiet time of day since the migrants were all out working at whatever day jobs they could find, but I could not relax.

I wandered into the offices and meeting rooms, pestering Diana Morales, an immigration lawyer working for the Center for Human Rights housed in the building, and Diana Rodriguez, in charge of education and communication for the Center. I read all the signs and prayers on the walls and the brochures on the counters. I learned that

men and women arrive daily to the *Casa* both from the south, especially southern Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, after weeks of walking through deserts, hitchhiking, or hopping freight trains; and also from the north, after being raided, torn from their families, and deported by the U.S. From either direction they arrive desperate and disoriented, recounting experiences of being robbed, beaten, extorted, traded, or raped by ruthless drug gangs or corrupt policemen.

Because of extreme poverty, lack of jobs, and ongoing civil wars, these people have been forced to leave their homes and families, desperate to find a job, a decent life, survival. Usually only after paying a "coyote" guide anywhere from \$500 to \$5,000 per person do they make it over the border, and then if they get caught, their only option is to raise the money to try again and again, which leads them and their families that much further into debt.



*Storage room full of used clothes.*

That afternoon Manuel drove Paul and me back to the border crossing, where we watched for several hours as buses and trucks brought over the day's deportees. At nightfall we returned to *Casa del Migrante* with a new group who would be staying to work for a day or two to have money to take back to their families.

I sat in on an interview that *Fray Pascualito* was conducting with a 33 year-old man who had been deported that day, after having lived with his family in southern California since he was two months old. *Fray* told him his only legal way to return would be to get work wherever he could, save enough money to hire an immigration lawyer, and begin the long, hard, expensive process toward obtaining the required papers. It would be years, *Fray* told him, before he would see his family again.

I learned that the number of women migrants is climbing drastically because they have even fewer opportunities for

*Freight trains like this are known as "La Bestia."*



education and jobs in their homeland than men. For many, staying is not an option; they would rather risk being victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation.

**A**dded to that fear is the emotional turmoil that mothers are subjected to, as discussed in the November 2007 newsletter *Los Rostros de La Migracion*, "...with the dilemma of either bringing their children with them...and exposing them to a series of risks, or leaving them

*behind for indefinite periods of time,*" perhaps never to see them again.

In the same newsletter is an interview with a 26 year-old woman who had arrived at *Casa del Migrante* from Honduras, leaving behind a 2 year-old son. *"We rode on the axles of the [train] wheels and we couldn't sleep because if we did we could have fallen."* Two and a half months pregnant when she left home, she went days without eating or drinking and she lost her baby, but she could not seek medical care because, without papers, she would have been deported. She told the Dominican sister who interviewed her, *"What gives me strength is that I'm here now and very soon I will be able to cross the border into the United States...to end this suffering and be able to offer a more dignified life to my son so that he doesn't have to suffer like I have."*

While Paul and I waited to meet with the women from the



*Lesley with Diana M. and Diana R. in the interview room of the Center for Human Rights.*

Center for Human Rights, they were working on a typical case: a couple had been deported after their house in the U.S. was raided, and now they were desperate to get back to the baby they had been forced to leave behind with authorities. The Center had called the Mexican immigration authorities for them, who refused to intercede, and as usual, the Mexican Consulate was not answering the phone.

In another recent case, a father from Honduras had tried to “pass” for Mexican, a common practice for South Americans for whom the life of poverty in Mexico is preferable to the life of extreme poverty in their homeland. He was being deported, and rather than take his family back with him, he chose to leave them in the U.S, most likely never to see them again. He asked, “*What kind of father would I be to ask my family to move back with me to such misery?*”

According to the Most Rev. Joseph Fiorenza, Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, “...we have found that migrants, given a choice, would prefer to remain in their homeland. Only by addressing the root causes of flight, such as economic inequities and conflict, will we create a world in which migrants will not have to confront the desert or put their trust in the hands of dangerous smugglers in order to support their families.” (Houston Catholic Worker 2005)

I asked everyone I met in Ciudad Juarez, those at the *Casa* as well as those at the border crossing, “*What is the answer?*”

Of course there is no simple answer to such a complex problem. All agreed though that until the “root causes” are addressed, until their native countries develop sustainable economies with job-creating industries, these poor will continue to be forced to endure the vicious cycle of life-threatening risks, persecution, exploitation, raids and deportation. *All further agreed that, regardless of our political beliefs, we cannot, as Catholics, ignore the deplorable conditions and human rights violations that migrants are forced to endure, that we must do whatever we can to advocate for them and to change the way they are treated.*

A month after returning from the *Casa*, I happened to read in the paper that an ice chest containing four human heads had been delivered to the Ciudad Juarez police station. According to the October 21 AP report, “*Cartels have turned to beheading their enemies as they battle each other for control of lucrative smuggling routes.*” Fray Pascualito had told us that cartel members even block ambulances from carrying their injured rivals to the hospital.

Thanks to Fr. Martin, I was not made aware beforehand of the dangers of this border city, or I might have opted not to go. For migrants, however, there is no option, and of this I am now acutely aware.

Peace and hope in this New Year,  
*Lesley Warnshuis*

*This appeared just before we went to print.*

(11-29) 12:25 PST **CIUDAD JUAREZ**, Mexico (AP) --Police say at least 12 masked gunmen opened fire inside a restaurant in the northern border city of **Ciudad Juarez**, killing eight.

Chihuahua state prosecutor's office spokesman Alejandro Pariente says the gunmen arrived at the seafood restaurant Friday evening in three cars, approached a group of people and opened fire. Pariente says no arrests have been made.

The attack comes days after police found the bodies of seven men who were killed in a school soccer field in an upscale neighborhood of **Ciudad Juarez**, across the border from El Paso, Texas.

The homicides were the latest of hundreds of killings in the city, where drug violence has taken a heavy toll during Mexico's nationwide crackdown on drug cartels that supply U.S. consumers.

*Prayer for Peace  
in the Diocese of  
Ciudad Juarez*

*Oh God, Creator of the Universe,  
Who extends His fatherly care to all  
His children:*

*Renew in us the wonders of Your  
compassion; send Your Spirit over  
this City so that rivals can begin to  
dialogue; and all can compromise in  
the genuine search for true Peace;  
so that all discord is eliminated; so  
that charity overcomes hate, and  
forgiveness overcomes the desire for  
revenge. We ask you this through  
the intercession of Our Holy Lady of  
Guadalupe. Amen*