

# Pax Christi Little Rock serves ‘saints on the border’

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



Seven members of Pax Christi in Little Rock recently traveled to El Paso to participate in a six-day border immersion program called The Encuentro Project.

Dr. Sherry Simon, a parishioner of Christ the King Church in Little Rock and chairwoman of Pax Christi USA, said the group spent the trip speaking with individuals at the border, participating in educational training seminars and serving the most vulnerable populations.

“We went to four different seminars every day,” Simon said. “One of the days, we went to Juarez (Mexico), and while we were there, we visited one of the churches that was just on the other side of the border. We heard a lot from the priest there ... as well as a woman who lived there, about the experience of the refugees — the brutality of the police, the poverty, everything. The Catholic Church has really done a beautiful job of working so hard over there to support the refugees who ... are just waiting there to come to the country...”

After several days of educational seminars and hearing the stories of refugees at the border, Pax Christi also had an opportunity to put their newfound skills to use and serve those in need.

“The last two days we spent working in a refugee center in El Paso called Casa Papa Francisco, and that was very educational. The task they put before us ... was to shop for the food, cook the food and serve the food for Casa Papa Francisco refugees. ... That was eye-opening.”

In the summer of 2023, Pax Christi members took their first mission trip to the border with the focus of volunteering every day. Simon said this year's trip was "much more intensive."

"We just got so much education," she said. "This Encuentro Project is an incredible group that was started by Sacred Heart Church in El Paso ... on this particular trip, I met saints at the border. The saints who are helping, as well as the people who are coming over, because we had a lot more opportunity to talk with the refugees themselves as well as the Catholic sisters. Their presence made a huge difference to us this time."

Pax Christi Little Rock president Mary Hunt, a member of Christ the King Church in Little Rock, said the Oct. 22-27 trip was "emotional and educational."

"I am filled with admiration for the amazing angels and saints on this earth who serve the needs of immigrants," she said. "We also met refugees and heard their firsthand stories of the horrendous situations that they are escaping. My heart hurts for them and from learning just how much our U.S. government laws and procedures are creating unnecessary blocks to welcoming these talented, hardworking and loving people."

"It upsets me when I hear the lies about how the majority of immigrants are dangerous. El Paso, with their high level of immigrants, is the fifth safest big city in the U.S. The border is not open — in fact, there are so few immigrants crossing this year that the shelter at Sacred Heart Catholic Church was able to close."

Pax Christi members joining the trip to the border were other Christ the King parishioners, Dr. George Simon, husband of Dr. Sherry Simon, Jan Pipkin and Isabel Adam as well as Phyllis Baltz, a member of St. Mary Church in Hot Springs, and Ann Lassiter, a member of St. Francis of Assisi Church in Raleigh, N.C., formerly of Little Rock.

The Pax Christi members spoke with many individuals, not just those in need of help, but those serving others, so they would be better equipped to carry on their mission as an organization, even after returning home.

"Our goal in going wasn't just to grow ourselves, but our goal is to take this information back to folks here," Sherry said. "We're making a PowerPoint, and we already have a plan to share it with all of the Pax Christi chapters in the state of Texas on Nov. 20, and we're going to share it with our own people."

Hunt said the trip allowed her to learn more about Catholic Social Teaching and about how "we as Catholics can be part of the solution in welcoming our neighbors in need."

"Hopefully, spreading our first-hand knowledge will help counteract the paranoia spread by some information channels," Hunt said.

Simon said she was moved by the number of individuals willing to help those who had little to nothing, and that the experience moved many people to have a change of heart.

"... That's what we found throughout our visit — people coming together, definitely Catholics, but everyone — coming together to help these migrants who have no support..." Simon said. "The majority of folks coming over are families who are fleeing terrible situations, economic situations, situations of violence and persecution and disaster ... who are trying to find a place to raise their children. ... I'll tell you what happens when you go over there. You change. What

we found was when we walk with these folks at the border, when we walk with our neighbors, our hearts change and we realize the importance of helping one another, not turning people away. ”

For more information on Pax Christi Little Rock, visit [paxchristilittlerock.org/](http://paxchristilittlerock.org/). For more information on the Encuentro Project, visit [encuentroproject.org](http://encuentroproject.org).

**CORRECTION:** *The original publication of this article stated 11 Arkansas Catholics were working on this project. This online version has been corrected.*