Blog
Spirituality



Our group from Movimiento Juvenil sings and delivers a basket of Thanksgiving food to a family who lives in a house across the street from the St. Thomas More Parish in Chaparral, New Mexico. (Samantha Kominiarek)



by Samantha Kominiarek

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is an Assumption Mission Associate in Chaparral, New Mexico.*

When I think of Thanksgiving, I think of sitting around the table with my family, laughing, sharing a delicious meal together. I started to panic a little at the start of November when I realized my Thanksgiving celebration would be different this year because I would not be with my family. In fact, I was unsure where or with whom I would celebrate this holiday. Now, I realize I was lucky to be able to celebrate Thanksgiving with many different people in many different ways that all involved experiences of gratitude.

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At 8 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 23, about 50 people from Movimiento Juvenil, the youth group in Chaparral, gathered at St. Thomas More parish to distribute Thanksgiving baskets to families in Chaparral. The baskets we created were filled with various food donations from the group and the community.

We filled two pickup trucks with these baskets, then piled into numerous cars, and we were off! Edgar, the lead coordinator of Movimiento Juvenil, had carefully crafted a route for all of us to deliver the baskets together.

When we arrived at our first house, we got out of the cars and started singing "Dios Está Aquí," a beautiful song about the certainty of God being here with us. Some people played guitars, too, as we walked up to the front door. Someone rang the doorbell, and we continued singing as we waited for the door to be opened. Eventually, the family came to the door and stepped out onto the front steps to listen as we sang. They received the basket with gratitude and wanted to share hugs with many of us.



The day before Thanksgiving, I joined the Assumption Sisters and other community members of Chaparral in serving dinner at Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas. (Samantha Kominiarek)

The rest of the day continued like this. I was touched by the amount of thanks the families receiving the baskets wanted to share. One woman invited us into her home. All of us snuggled into her living room, which was not meant for 50 people. Here, we sang to her mother, who appeared to be ill. The lyrics to the song really felt true: God is here.

On Wednesday, Nov. 27, the sisters and I served a pre-Thanksgiving feast at Annunciation House, a hospitability program for immigrants and refugees in El Paso, Texas. We spent the morning preparing macaroni and cheese, beans, carne guisada and atole. While serving the meal, I made a point to make eye contact with the person I was serving. I noticed the gratitude in their eyes.

On Thursday, Nov. 28, I celebrated Thanksgiving with Veronica, my friend from the running group, and her family and friends. Veronica and I had run together a couple of times. On one of our runs in mid-November, she asked what my Thanksgiving plans were. I said I was still figuring it out. She did not hesitate before she said, "You are welcome to come to my house!" I happily accepted her invitation. Her family and friends were kind and welcoming and made me feel as though I belonged there. I felt so much gratitude to be invited to share this meal with them.

On Saturday, Nov. 30, one of my friends from Las Americas, an immigrant advocacy center where I volunteer once a week, hosted a "Lazarus potluck" for local volunteers and friends. She and her housemates put a twist on the biblical story of Lazarus, who would have eaten the scraps of food from the rich man's table: We were invited to bring our Thanksgiving scraps, or leftovers, to share.

This dinner was a beautiful celebration of community and joy. I met many amazing people who are working for love and justice here in the El Paso community. After many hugs and introductions, we sat in a circle and sang "Gracias a la Vida," a song about the many simple and wonderful things we can say "thank you" for. Then we shared a meal that seemed too delicious to be considered "scraps" and conversed about meaningful topics, such as how we ended up here. I felt so much gratitude to be welcomed into this amazing community of people and to be able to sit and talk together.

Mari Andrew, one of my favorite people on Instagram, posted about what it means to have sustainable gratitude. She said:

> Being grateful ≠ being happy
>
> Gratitude = noticing, paying attention, being present

Which is accompanied by a range of feelings — not all purely positive

Which is a good reminder of your humanity

This is why I say my Thanksgiving season has been full of feelings of gratitude. I noticed the gratitude with which the families in Chaparral received the Thanksgiving baskets, but there was also a realization that this food would only last for a temporary amount of time. The gratitude in the eyes of the immigrants and refugees at Annunciation House was beautiful but also acknowledges that this is just one meal on a long journey that may continue for some time. I felt gratitude for the feeling of belonging and the feeling of being welcomed into Veronica's home to celebrate Thanksgiving with her, her family and her friends. The feelings of gratitude I felt during the potluck feast filled me with joy and peace but reminded me that there is so much work to still be done as we fight for more love in this world.

This range of feelings I experience so often reminds me that I am human, just as Mari Andrew said. So I take a deep breath, let it out, and embrace this humanity.

[Samantha Kominiarek is doing a year of service with the Assumption Mission Associates in Chaparral, New Mexico.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.