Blog
Spirituality



Mari, right, and me in our Mexican dresses at her brother's despedida de solteros. (Provided photo)



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.*

As I prepare to go home to Massachusetts for two weeks to celebrate Christmas with my family, I have been thinking a lot about how I first started preparing to come to Chaparral. I researched the program and the town of Chaparral, asked questions about the Assumption Mission Associates, and had many important conversations with people who had done years of service and others who were also preparing for one after graduation.

Throughout the spring semester of my senior year, I had many chats with Grace, one of the campus ministry associates at St. Joseph's University, my alma mater. Grace spent a year of service in Ecuador with the Rostro de Cristo program. She shared her experiences with me, answered my numerous questions and provided me with other ideas to reflect on.

One afternoon, we talked about how our hearts are always expanding. Grace said there's no capacity to how full our hearts can be. There is always room for more love.

When I reflect on my past few months in Chaparral, I feel as though my heart really has expanded. My heart is full of so much more love because of the people I have met here and the experiences we have shared.



Kerchak smells some yummy peanut butter treats in Krystal's pocket. (Samantha Kominiarek)

Last week, Krystal, one of my students, invited me to visit her home to meet Kerchak, her sweet new puppy. After we played in the yard with Kerchak, Krystal's family welcomed me into their house for dinner and a movie.

A few months ago, Mari, my friend in the Chaparral community, took me to a market to buy a Mexican dress for her brother's *despedida de solteros* ("goodbye to single life," or bachelor party), which is a party celebrated with the whole family. The party was a beautiful and fun celebration of love that I was happy to witness.

On Dec. 12, we celebrated the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I was touched by how meaningful this celebration was for the people of Chaparral. We gathered at six in the morning for *manañitas*, where we sang songs to Our Lady, such as "La Guadalupana," followed by a celebration of Mass, then a delicious breakfast in the church hall. The Assumption Sisters described the priest's homily as "tender," which I felt was a good description.

Over the weekend of Dec. 14, Movimiento Juvenil, the local youth group, performed a *pastorela*, a version of the Nativity that included a dance-off between angels and devils and ended with a touching scene about the real meaning of Christmas.



Assumption Sr. Diana Wauters and one of the devils in the pastorela (Samantha Kominiarek)

Experiences like these expand my heart because of the welcoming attitudes of kindness and love the people have here in Chaparral.

However, at times, my heart has felt broken and overwhelmed by encounters with others and information I have learned. This sometimes feels uncomfortable and painful. I have wondered, "How many times can my heart break?" "How much

change is possible for my heart to accept?" "How will my heart be able to handle this experience?"

The week of Dec. 9 at Las Americas, an immigrant advocacy center in El Paso, Texas, I learned about a new asylum agreement between the United States and Guatemala. This agreement sends Central American asylum-seekers who passed through Guatemala on their way to the United States back to Guatemala, a country thousands of its own people are fleeing because of violence and poverty. Guatemala was left with no other choice but to accept this agreement or face economic repercussions. Knowing that there are policies such as this makes me mad.

That same week, my middle school students took a standardized test for the state of New Mexico. Almost all of them failed. Because they are learning English as a second language, they do not have the typical vocabulary of a seventh-grade student who speaks English as his or her first language, making this test incredibly challenging for them.

The students were frustrated, and so were the teachers. They spent precious class time taking these tests, and the students will never receive the corrected tests to learn what they did not previously know.

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There is so much learning and growth occurring in these classrooms, but the standardized tests do not show it. While there is a purpose and a need for some type of standardized assessment, I believe this one is an injustice to these students' educations and their teachers' dedication.

At Annunciation House on Dec. 16, Border Patrol dropped off an 18-year-old woman who was six and a half months pregnant. She had left her home in Guatemala with her husband but lost him somewhere along the way and has not heard from him since. Her face was covered with fear and terror. I can't even imagine what her journey might have involved.

I do not know how one's heart could not feel broken after moments like this. However, these people and these experiences allow me to expand my heart. There

is no capacity to how full of love it can be. There is also no limit to how many times a heart can break. Our hearts have so much space for love, sorrow and gratitude.

When I think back to my original conversation with Grace, I had no idea how many experiences I would have that would expand my heart. I am grateful for the awareness of this feeling. I am also excited to be home and to share these experiences with my friends and family.



The beautiful Our Lady of Guadalupe statue at our church, covered with roses in her honor (Samantha Kominiarek)

[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.