News
Q&As



Sr. María Luisa Silverio Cruz makes regular trips by car along the railroad tracks in the State of Hidalgo, Mexico, to bring food to displaced persons. (Ángel Adrián Huerta García)



by Ángel Adrián Huerta García

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Mexico City — February 6, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Sr. Maria Luisa Silverio Cruz has been the coordinator of *la Casa del Migrante El Samaritano* for the past 5 years. She remains committed, at 51 years of age, to her struggle to support migrants. This shelter provides vital humanitarian assistance, offering food, clothing, rest, and medical care to displaced persons.

Silverio Cruz led this work from 2012 to 2014 and returned in 2018 to once again take up the reins of running the shelter, located in the Bojay neighborhood in the central State of Hidalgo, near the train tracks where thousands of people board a train to reach the United States.

Mexico's Migration Policy Department registered 686,732 people whose applications were submitted and channeled to migration authorities between January and November 2023. These figures reflect an increase of 695% of migrants or asylum seekers, compared to the last decade. In 2013, registration with migration authorities was only 86,298, which shows a sharp contrast with the current reality.

> The flow of migrants moving through Hidalgo, Mexico, to the U.S. increased in the last months of 2023, with almost 1,000 arriving at the Sisters of the Sacred Heart shelter in a single day.
>
> Tweet this

"The situation in the shelter is quite challenging and dynamic," Silverio Cruz recounted in an interview with Global Sisters Report. "People continually arrive, mainly through a train that runs once a week. When it leaves, very few people are left, and sometimes none at all," she explained.

"It is a constant flow of arrivals and departures," said the sister of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. "Some people try to move on to Huichapan when they have the money to do so, although there is no certainty they will make it," she explained.

Originally from Mexico, Silverio Cruz has done missionary work as a member of her congregation, being sent to countries such as Paraguay, Ecuador, Chile and Brazil. The purpose of this congregation is to make the journey of migrants through the region of Tula, in central Mexico, more bearable.

According to the *Red de Documentación de las Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes* (Redodem), the flow of migrants in recent months, in the state of Hidalgo and in the shelter, has increased, reaching almost a thousand in a single day.

Global Sisters Report: How has the perception of your community work in Atotonilco evolved over time, and how do you face the current difficulties of continuing to help those in need?

Silverio Cruz: Previously, there was a deeply rooted idea among people about our community in Atotonilco: "We live there and do nothing." However, our work goes beyond the parish; it has a strong social focus, ranging from care for migrants in their home, to a gradual understanding of reality on the part of the community. Although some think that we have no worries, our primary concern is how we can continue to provide assistance and food to those most in need. Our current preoccupation is finding ways to sustain this work. The increasing participation in the project, and people's growing awareness, are the result of sharing our experiences, like when someone comes forward with their little bag of rice and a half liter of oil, giving what they can to live on.

- 

Displaced persons travel along the train tracks in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico, seeking to reach the northern border of México and the U.S. (Ángel Adrián Huerta García)

- 

Sr. Maria Luisa Silverio is concerned about how the Sisters of the Sacred Heart will continue to provide food, housing, and clothing to the people who come to the shelter, and whose numbers have multiplied exponentially. (Ángel Adrián Huerta García)

- 

People in transit are fed with what the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary carry as they travel. (Ángel Adrián Huerta García)

How would you describe the influence of your personal experiences on your spiritual journey and religious vocation?

My personal experiences have deeply shaped my spiritual journey and my religious vocation. Coming from a large family, and having felt the desire to be a missionary at some point, these experiences marked my path to consecrated life. The feeling of wanting to do something more, to be of service to others, is what led me to consider this vocation. It was never part of my initial life plans, but it came as an inner call.

What is your best moment of the day?

My best moment is not so much during the day, but rather during the week. It's when I see people get on the train and leave. When the children are able to eat especially brightens up the day. We try to have milk for children, and baby food, and to see the children happy while they eat, unaware of migration and the difficulties involved, is a special moment. For them, this can be part of life and, although it is

not just one child but whole groups of children, they always keep smiling.

These moments are special because, although they are worried about the uncertainty of the journey, for them it is also exciting. Many of them are facing their first train ride, despite the dangers that are involved.

> "My best moment is not so much during the day, but rather during the week. It's when I see people get on the train and leave."
>
> — Sr. Maria Luisa Silverio Cruz
>
> Tweet this

How do you live your spiritual journey and religious vocation?

In our religious life, we share our personal experiences during community and personal prayer. In the beginning, some people thought that we did not do much in Atotonilco, however, our work is not limited to the parish but has a more social focus, such as caring for migrants. The community has been coming to understand this reality, and also our concerns. We are concerned about how we will continue to serve, provide food, and support so many people.

Our role is to accompany, support, and hold these various visions and realities.

How do you interpret the meaning of being part of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in your daily life and work as a religious?

When I joined the congregation many years ago, there was no specific work with migrants in our community. Our congregation, Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, has a spirituality centered on mercy. It is not just sentimental, but the core of our experience of faith — to touch the reality of humanity in its misery and need from the compassionate heart of Jesus. In my spiritual journey, I have encountered Jesus in reality, in his humanity, thirst, hunger and need. He is not only a distant Jesus on high, but one who is present in human needs.

To be part of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary is to understand spirituality from the perspective of mercy and service. It is to see humanity and faith from the heart, from the depths of people. In my daily life, this translates into serving others by being present to those who need it most.

Advertisement

What have been the greatest challenges you have faced in working to be a peacemaker for people experiencing human displacement in such a diverse and fractured society?

The challenges in my work are constant, especially in relation to security. There are kidnappings, and migrants are taken advantage of. Society is two-faced: they do not want migrants, and yet they benefit from them. This puts our humanitarian work at risk. Lack of security is a big problem, but sometimes it is difficult to know who is behind the kidnappings. The media also plays a role, misinforming and dividing society. There was a false report about the closing of the shelter, which created confusion and uncomfortable questions about our ability to care for migrants.

What lessons have you learned from your religious leaders, and who are they?

I feel that when someone makes a commitment, whether it is a great figure like Mandela, or the woman who had the vision to found and give birth to our congregation during the French Revolution, it shows us that things can be done. Of course, we don't play at being heroines, but it is in our hands to do something about it.

> "There are kidnappings, and migrants are taken advantage of. Society is two-faced: they do not want migrants, and yet they benefit from them. This puts our humanitarian work at risk."
>
> — Sr. Maria Luisa Silverio Cruz

Tweet this

What lessons do you consider most valuable for your work and spiritual life?

I have always said that it is a job for those of us who are here, a challenge to be in this place with so many people. Maybe what we do is not enormously significant. I

have seen when we went to an area near the shelter, or right here, that people did not have anything to eat. Why does this happen? If you don't go, there are people who don't eat, and this is serious; there are people who don't eat because they don't have money and are only at the mercy of the train.

How do you stay motivated and focused on your mission, in spite of the challenges and obstacles you may encounter in your work?

I believe that my motivation and focus come from the spirit of service, and the desire to experience the mercy of God in others. People's suffering compels me to act; I understand that it is not their fault that they are in this situation. So, that same motivation, the longing to discover something different for them, is what drives me. Why do so many people come? One train left with many people; another one follows with many more. It is a constant influx of thousands, an incessant deluge of people.

[This Q&A was originally published in Spanish on Jan. 11, 2024.]

This story appears in the **Welcoming the Stranger** feature series. View the full series.