News
Q&As



Members of women's support circles gather at Most Holy Trinity Parish in Detroit, Michigan, to celebrate Mass on World Day of Migrants and Refugees in September 2021. "Women under God's protection" reads one sign in Spanish. (Courtesy of Martha de la Torre Juárez)



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July 4, 2024

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***Editor's note**: Global Sisters Report's new series, "Welcoming the Stranger," takes a closer look at women religious working with immigrants and migrants. While we cover this topic often, this series will feature sisters and organizations networking to better serve those crossing borders, global migration trends and the topic of immigration in the upcoming U.S. presidential election.*



Creating circles of support, spiritual accompaniment and repairing the hearts of immigrant women in the state of Michigan are among the main ministries of Sr. Martha de la Torre Juárez, Sister of Mary Reparatrix and co-director for leadership development of Strangers No Longer.

"My mission is to accompany and promote immigrant women and men who have come to this country looking for a better life for their families," De la Torre Juárez told Global Sisters Report. "In my ministry, I share who I am: a woman called and repaired by God's unconditional love."

De la Torre Juárez is a Mexican American member of the congregation of the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix, whose charism is to show the tenderness with which God loves, reconciles and repairs the world. "We work to show the love that repairs, heals wounds and reconciles people with themselves and God," De la Torre Juarez said.

Intending to work in her congregation's mission, De la Torre Juárez arrived in the United States in 2010. Ten years later, she connected with Strangers No Longer, founded in 2017 and dedicated to accompanying immigrants and advocating for their rights in Michigan.

"It was through direct support to families in crisis during the pandemic that I gradually got to know the organization better and came in touch with the family mothers and the situations they were going through," De la Torre Juárez said.

The life stories of these immigrant women encouraged De la Torre Juárez to start the first women's support circle of Strangers No Longer in 2020.

"In these spaces, we feel confident to talk about our experiences, pray together and look for options to help each other to improve difficult situations," De la Torre Juárez said. "We talk about the life challenges in this country and the hopes of our families."

De la Torre Juárez currently coordinates nine support circles for women and one for men across the state.

"Sr. Martha has brought to us the Jesus-like commitment to the people and the building of the Kingdom with them," said Bill O'Brien, founder and executive director of Strangers No Longer. "Her work has been critical in connecting the immigrant leaders to the non-immigrant leaders in many parishes in Michigan. They are taking their place in Michigan as collaborators in building the Kingdom of God."

Since 2021, De la Torre Juárez has served as the foundation's co-director for leadership development, a position she shares with Amy Ketner, who coordinates circles of support for youth in high schools.

"In addition to providing education on immigration issues, accompaniment and direct support to families in crisis, our work is also to advocate for more humane immigration policies," De la Torre Juárez said.



Sr. Martha de la Torre Juárez, co-director for leadership development of Strangers No Longer, leads a women's support circle in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in summer 2022. (Courtesy of Martha de la Torre Juárez)

***GSR*: What is your main ministry in the circles of support?**

De la Torre Juárez: Motivating and encouraging immigrant women and men to become leaders and agents of their own change. That is not something simple, but little by little, we are building a foundation of faith and rooted in their reality.

I accompany them in their personal growth and leadership process so that they discover how God has been present in their lives, helping and protecting them at all times. This experience of God's mercy, tenderness and forgiveness helps them recognize the full potential that God has given them to face their daily lives.

Knowing that they are loved and valued by God, the women and men in the circles feel compelled to do something to make their lives better. They are also motivated to help other immigrants.

Why are support circles important?

The situation experienced by hundreds of women and men here is not easy at all. Many of them feel unsafe in the face of a culture totally different from their own and, in some cases, facing a society that rejects and excludes them.

These brothers and sisters are gradually going through an adaptation process. It involves many things, such as lack of income, extreme climate, distance from family and lack of access to basic services. It is a process that is made more complicated when people are and feel alone.

At Strangers No Longer, we seek to make them feel God's closeness through our support actions. We offer them spaces for personal and spiritual growth so that they can discover their own leadership.



Sr. Martha de la Torre Juárez, second from right, with Sr. Norma Pimentel and two women from women's support groups, during a meeting organized by Strangers No Longer in summer 2022 (Courtesy of Martha de la Torre Juárez)

What have been the fruits of Strangers No Longer's work on behalf of immigrants?

By listening directly to women, we have been able to develop a platform that allows us to guide our advocacy work on behalf of immigrants.

In addition, we have achieved joint work between immigrants and non-immigrants to dignify the lives of all. For example, since 2022, we have implemented annual Human Dignity Assemblies, which help us to engage in dialogue and strategize.

Another fruit has been our advocacy day in Lansing, Michigan, in February 2023. Immigrants and non-immigrants met with legislators to speak out in favor of the "Drive SAFE" bill so that all immigrants can have a driver's license. Strangers No Longer will continue to advocate for this cause.

Our efforts are paying off when we see people taking their own leadership.

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How do you find God in your work?

Ignatian spirituality helps me to "find God in all things," and my accompaniment of immigrant sisters and brothers makes me discover God in the simplicity of their faith and in their way of overcoming fears and difficulties to come out of the shadows.

This closeness to their lives makes me say, like Jesus, "I give praise to you, Father, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned, you have revealed them to the childlike."

Their lives and their struggles have taught me that God has been, is and will always be present, protecting them from every danger. They are my teachers of trust in God!