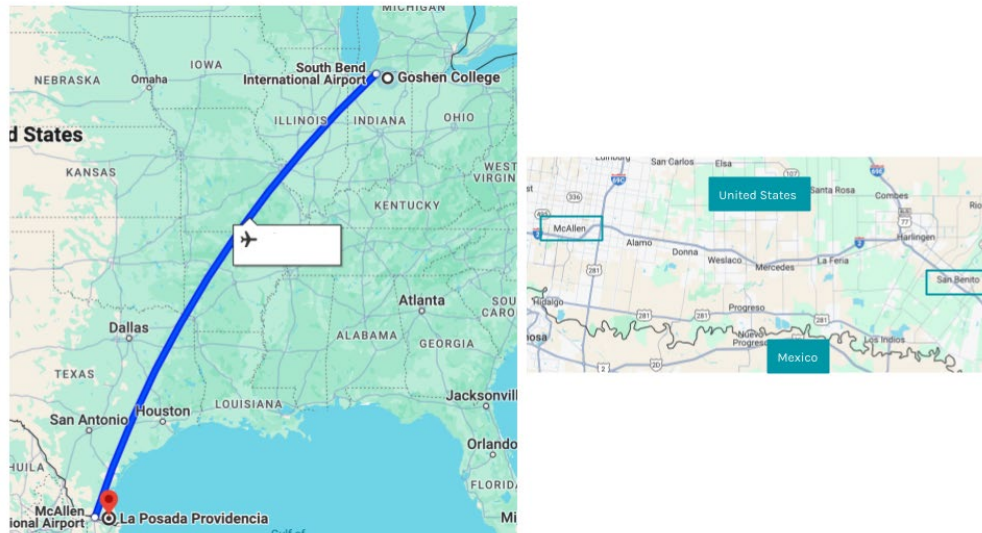




Leading and teaching Goshen College students during the second trimester of my pregnancy for a three week class in the Rio Grande Valley conjures up frequent memories for me. We spent most of our time in the southeastern part of Texas between McAllen and Brownsville — at an organization called “La Posada Providencia” located in San Benito. This organization’s name means “The Inn” and is named after the story of Jesus’s birth as Mary and Joseph sought shelter and refuge as Mary was giving birth to Jesus.

La Posada seeks to provide emergency shelter, temporarily, for people who have just arrived into the United States or who have just been released from a detention center. The majority of those who utilize La Posada’s shelter and educational services are using them for a short period of time before they make their way to their final destination in the United States. As an organization along the border with Mexico, having a mission that focuses on supporting the transient nature of the immigrants and refugees is extremely important; most of the people who seek shelter at La Posada are on their way to somewhere else, and just need some time to sleep, rest, and be connected to resources.



One of the connections the organization's leaders made for us was with a humanitarian respite center, Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, located in McAllen. Sometimes people would go from La Posada to the respite center before making their way to their destination, often via bus. As we arrived at the respite center I noticed the close proximity to the bus center; that close proximity is helpful for the refugees but also screams to me, "Your time here is temporary. You don't belong here long-term. Find a new place to settle in."

As we entered the respite center, which is a renovated warehouse, I was astonished by the number of people I saw; tearful as I saw the hundreds of children who were laughing, playing, and waiting. I remember seeing other pregnant women and feeling an overwhelming sense of awe -- I could not imagine traveling on foot, in trunks of cars, or via bus for the number of miles that many of these women had just traveled. It brought up the image of Mary and Joseph traveling together on the backs of donkeys.

We spent the first bit of time hearing from Sister Norma, one of the nuns who runs the respite center. She encouraged us to spend the rest of the time talking with the families who were using the center's service. We were also invited to help in some small ways with the center such as cleaning bathrooms, handing out care kits, and organizing their donation storage center.



The first picture is the Rio Grande River -- we heard many stories of the ways people cross through the river.

The second picture is near Alamo -- close to McAllen. If you look closely, you can see "the wall" which is two large fences but they don't touch each other. It was like this for many miles -- pieces of fence that do not connect to one another.

As our afternoon was coming to a close, one of my students came to me and brought me over to meet the family she had been talking with. They had just crossed into the United States after journeying for over a month with their two year old son. I asked if they knew where they were headed next and my student laughed -- this is why she wanted me to come meet these people. Their next stop was Elkhart County, Indiana.

Excitedly, I wrote down information about the Center for Healing and Hope. I told them about our Natural Helpers Program, health care services for people without insurance, and the GRID card program. They shared with me their excitement for the opportunity to give their son safety, which is something they felt they couldn't provide for him in their home country.

I think about this family often, as my son is almost the same age as their son when I met them two years ago. I wonder if they made it safely to Indiana, whether they found housing and meaningful work in Elkhart County, if they

were able to seek services and connections at Center for Healing and Hope.

I wonder about the connection in our minds between being okay with substandard services for immigrants and how our telling of the stable story doesn't include wondering why it appears so hospitable for the inn-keeper to allow Mary to give birth in their stable. What would it look like if instead we said the inn-keeper should've given up their own bedroom for Mary to give birth or connect them with a friend who has extra space in their home. What if the inn-keeper would've called upon a local midwife to help Mary give birth -- connecting her to local resources?

As a board member, the past three years I have spent time asking how CHH could move from a temporary resource to an organization that stays connected with people. What would it look like for us to welcome immigrants in a way that says, "take our bedroom, I'll go get the midwife who helped deliver my child, let me take you over to my friend's house for a warm meal"?

Our creative and compassionate mission calls us to shift how we talk about our services, how CHH is no longer just a temporary health care clinic for immigrants and those without insurance, but rather a medical home for people where they build trusting, loving relationships with medical providers and immigrant resources. I also believe we are called to build more long-lasting relationships with other organizations in Elkhart County; to lead conversations about how we could build a stronger network of organizations focused on supporting new immigrants and refugees in our community.



The last day at La Posada we had a meal with all the staff. Such a wonderful moment to share the joy of a meal together. The cook at La Posada was once a guest at La Posada -- a new refugee. Now he is their full-time cook!

I hope that we can all find large and small ways to support the immigrants among us. To say **“Welcome home. We’d love to have you for as long as you’d like to stay.”**

Tune in next month for another story!

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& **HOPE**



Welcome Home