

DESERT BLOOMS

March 2016



When Pope Francis came in February we had quite a stir! He never quite made it to Santo Niño in person but we certainly felt his presence.

Thanks to Bishop Cantú of the Diocese of Las Cruces, we were able to snag one of the

life-size cut-outs of "Papa Francisco". A delegation including Sister Carol, Whitney, Romina, and Cynthia spent the night in Anapra before the pope's arrival in Juarez. Even Julia came back from the Pacific Northwest to join in the festivities. At 6 a.m. on Feb. 17 Sofia drove them downtown in the Santo Niño "Love Bus", along with Salvador, Tania, Erick and others trying to make their way to the fair-ground where the concluding Mass of the pope's visit would be held at 4:30 p.m. It was a long wait on a hot sunny day but the crowd of 250,000+ kept a joyful spirit. Pope Francis passed within ten yards of our pilgrims on his way to visit the border and his VIP guests on the other side of the Rio Grande. Sister Peggy and Denise were in that group that included 300 immigrants and refugees who awaited his blessing on the U.S. side of the border.

To sum up the effect of Pope Francis' visit on all of us who experienced it here, the word is HOPE! For so long Mexico has been a country in despair, caught in a downward spiral of violence, corruption and poverty. It was a place to be avoided. But Pope Francis chose to come to Mexico- and to the most violent places and marginalized people. He came with a message of encouragement for the downtrodden and challenge for the powerful.

When the pope visited, our Luci had the opportunity to be at the prison where her only son is incarcerated. Her eyes shimmered with tears and her face beamed as she recounted the experience. Pope Francis said, "Divine mercy reminds us that

prisons are an indication of the kind of society we are. In many cases, they are a sign of silence and omissions, which have led to a throwaway culture, a symptom of a culture that has stopped supporting life, of a society that has abandoned its children." Luci is a counter-sign to that kind of culture. She visits her son every week, not just for him but for others "who nobody ever comes to visit. I'm like a mamá to all of them". And she does this as a widow who also cares for two teenage daughters, including one who has severe seizures and autism.

Luci supports the family by using her laser visa to cross the bridge twice a week, purchasing and selling items that her neighbors request from the stores in downtown El Paso. Last week however, the U.S. customs agent determined that her visa was not in good condition. He pulled her aside for secondary screening, alleging that she was actually coming across to work in the U.S. as a domestic without a proper work visa. He searched through all her belongings as well as her person. Luci was embarrassed to admit that her daughter, Nena, had gotten a hold of the visa and chewed on it. When faced with the possibility of having the visa confiscated she explained that there is no way she could work in El Paso because she has a daughter who requires constant supervision. She pleaded with the agent who finally agreed to give her a month to get a new crossing card. This involves renewing her Mexican passport and applying for the laser visa, all of which will cost close to \$400 as well as time, transportation and childcare. There is no guarantee that Luci will be granted the visa. Several of our mothers have completed the application process and have been

refused. We pray for a fair and merciful agent when she is interviewed for the visa and along with Luci, we hang on to the message of Pope Francis:



<- Luci
& Nena

Hope