

# Immigrants

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As we continue to grapple with these questions, we find hope and direction from a verse and a hymn:

"...I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was hungry and you gave me food." — Jesus — Matthew 25:35

"God of the poor, friend of the weak, give us compassion we pray. Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain. Come, change our love from a spark to a flame." — (*Sing the Story*, #115)

*Dan King is a member of the Ohio Conference Immigration Resource Team.*

## Congregation's ministry focuses on healing trauma

In 2019, San Antonio Mennonite Church received a Traditioned Innovation Award from Duke Divinity School for the congregation's work toward healing the trauma experienced by immigrants. To learn more about San Antonio Mennonite's ministry, please read the feature article on the Duke Divinity's Faith and Leadership website:



<http://bit.ly/SanAntonioMennoTraumaHealing>.

San Antonio Mennonite Church's website also features a video with more information and practical advice about dealing with people who have experienced

trauma: <https://www.sanantoniomennonite.org/trauma-informed-christianity>.

Ohio Conference bulletin inserts are published six times per year by Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

For more information about the Ohio Conference, see the Conference website: [www.ohiomennoniteconference.org](http://www.ohiomennoniteconference.org)

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FEBRUARY 2020

## Serving immigrants in transition



*Dan and Jeanette King volunteered at Casa de Maria y Marta in San Antonio.*

### By Dan King

For a change in our Christmas vacation routines, my wife, Jeanette, and I decided to give two weeks as SOOP volunteers with San Antonio Mennonite Church this year. We had visited there briefly twice before and were touched in seeing the dedication of this small congregation in reaching out to immi-

grants in need. For five years they have been operating a hospitality house, *Casa de Maria y Marta*, where those who are released from immigration offices at the border can spend a night or two, enjoying showers, beds, and meals, before

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Supporting  
healthy, growing  
congregations

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going on to their final destinations somewhere else in the USA.

Upon our arrival, Pastor John Garland gave us a brief orientation to the guest house, a large two-story building two blocks from the church, with five bedrooms, two baths, and a good-sized dining area and kitchen. It quickly became apparent that one of our primary roles was to give Pastor John a break from this demanding 24-7 ministry, in order to spend time with his wife and two daughters during the holidays.

We were surprised to hear John say that, at present, almost no Hispanic immigrants were arriving at our Casa. This seemed to result from President Trump's recent orders that immigrants be turned back to wait for their asylum requests in Mexico. Oddly enough, however, immigration officials were permitting asylum seekers from the Congo (DRC), Angola, and Haiti to enter.

During our first week, with few overnight guests, we focused our energies on helping two young women from El Salvador, providing child care for their two ener-

*During our second week we hosted a total of 22 Congolese and 10 Angolans. Knowing that they spoke French and Portuguese, respectively, we expected to have difficulty communicating. But as they spoke with us in broken Spanish, we learned the reason: Their journeys from Africa to Brazil, then northward through Colombia and Central America lasted between nine months and two years!*

getic young daughters, as well as trips to the hospital, grocery store, and other offices. During our second week we hosted a total of 22 Congolese and 10 Angolans. Knowing that they spoke French and Portuguese, respectively, we expected to have difficulty communicating. But as they spoke with us in broken Spanish, we learned the reason: Their journeys from Africa to Brazil, then northward

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through Colombia and Central America lasted between nine months and two years! Naturally, the children and teenagers had picked up more Spanish than their parents during their long trek, and they were often the best communicators.

Most of our guests were openly Christian, allowing us (as best we could communicate) to talk about our faith and pray together. We often wondered what kinds of horrific situations in their homelands must be driving them to uproot and risk such a long and dangerous journey. And what kinds of conditions must presently exist on the Mexican side of the border for those who are being turned back and told to wait indefinitely in large makeshift camps? These are questions we typically don't see answered on our news media outlets.

We returned home with more questions than answers. What good was accomplished from our short-term efforts, in light of the magnitude of needs? How can we effect change among our elected officials for a more humane ap-



*Jeanette King and a young friend from Casa de Maria y Marta. To see more photos of Dan and Jeanette's time in San Antonio, go to <http://bit.ly/SanAntonioService>.*

proach to the needs of immigrants and asylum seekers? How can our country help improve living conditions in these countries of origin so that fewer persons are forced to make the gut-wrenching decision to uproot and relocate in a strange land?

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