

*For I was hungry and
you gave me food, I was
thirsty and you gave me
drink, a stranger and
you welcomed me.*

- Matt. 25:35

Summer, 2008



New Beginnings

La Posada Providencia Gets New Beginning of Our Own

Did you recognize us? We here at La Posada decided that 20 years is a long time to go without a makeover, so we've indulged in a little style update for *New Beginnings*. In honor of our anniversary, we've added more color to our newsletter, a little pizzazz to go with our stories, our own "New Beginning." But that's not our only communications news ...

THIS ISSUE:

- *New beginning, new look, this page*
- *Client encourages others to "be all we strive to be"*
- *Reflections from our founder, page two*
- *Volunteer recounts her summer*
- *New fundraiser promises fun for all!*



La Posada Providencia's new website can be found at www.lppshelter.org.

La Posada Providencia has a new home – homepage, that is. For the past several years, La Posada's website has been part of the site of the Sisters of Divine Providence, the community that sponsors La Posada. In July, we launched our own site, located at **www.lppshelter.org**. We hope you'll come to visit.

Both our new newsletter and our website were created to improve our communications with you. If you have any suggestions or questions, please let us know! You can reach our communications specialist, Therese Meyerhoff, at tmeyerhoff@divineprovidencesisters.org or 314-209-9181.

Everything We Strive To Be ...

Walid left Egypt in fear for his life, the victim of a hate crime. Now, more than 10 years later, he won't speak of his experience in his native country; he prefers to focus on his dreams for the future and what he needs to do to achieve them.

"I'm going to San Francisco," he declares with conviction. "I am going to film school."

Most of the people served by La Posada are new to the country, but Walid falls into a smaller category. He entered the United States in 1999 and stayed without gaining asylum or legal residency.

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www.lppshelter.org

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La Posada Providencia

1610 Marydale Road
San Benito, TX 78586
Tel: (956) 399-3826
Fax: (956) 399-2898

Email: cdlplaposada@sbcglobal.net

La Posada Founder Reflects on Ministry

Editor's note: Sister Hilary Hooks, CDP (formerly Sister Carolyn) founded La Posada Providencia in 1989. Her most recent ministry has been as a missionary in the Dominican Republic with other members of the Sisters of Divine Providence, who continue to sponsor La Posada. In some ways, she has shared the immigrant experience. She reflects on La Posada's 20th anniversary.

With umbrella in one hand and a wicker bag on my arm I squeeze closed the padlock to our front door. I snap open the umbrella and walk about two blocks to St. Martin's Center for the Elderly.



Sister Hilary Hooks, CDP (right)
with one of the regulars at the
Elderly Center in Santo Domingo.

I arrive at San Martin's and am met by Miguelina who says with a toothless grin, "Buenos dias, Madre Hilary!" Miguelina is one of the poorest of our elders at the Center but possesses a large spirit of gratitude for the tiniest favor.

Throughout the humid morning, about 13 or more elders come to the Center for bread and a hot chocolate drink seasoned with brown sugar, cinnamon sticks and cloves. Lunch at noon includes plates filled with rice and beans, a little meat or a vegetable. Close to 20 others rely on the Center for food.

The year I ministered in the Dominican Republic was grace-filled and blessed in every way. The Center for the Elderly was begun by Sister of Divine Providence Mary Providence Kriley, CDP. It has become a place of camaraderie and happiness where the Providence of God is concretely felt.

This year is the 20th anniversary of La Posada Providencia. The first refugee who came to the shelter, the day it opened on December 1st, 1989, was a Salvadoran woman, Teresa. It was a time when war was raging in El Salvador. Cold and frightened, Teresa was brought from the immigration detention center at night. Trying to make

her feel at home I made hot soup; then we sat together at the kitchen table eating. Suddenly Teresa said, "Do you know what? In my country, today we celebrate the feast of Divine Providence!" Teresa was reflecting on the goodness of God, and I felt an affirmation that the hand of God was a part of this ministry just in its infancy.



Miguelina

The Sisters of Divine Providence, including (former Program Director) Sister Margaret Mertens and (Program Director) Sister Zita Telkamp have carried the shelter to a level of quality at which those who find shelter can leave with greater preparedness to face life in the United States.

Although I am moving on from ministry in the Dominican Republic, my time there has inspired me to continue, with God's help, to work for the good of people and make God's Providence visible and celebrated in the world.

Grants Awarded, Fiscal Year 2008-09

St. Mary of the Woods	\$ 1,500
Conrad Hilton Foundation	\$ 7,500
Kenedy Memorial Foundation	\$ 7,500
Raskob Foundation	\$ 9,000
Scanlan Foundation	\$ 8,000
Strake Foundation	\$ 1,000
Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)	\$ 5,000
James R. Dougherty Found.	\$ 1,500
Gorges Foundation	\$ 2,500
AEP	\$ 2,481
Emergency Shelter Grants Program (ESGP)	\$38,866
Holy Spirit Foundation	\$ 4,000

Thank you for your generosity!

Walid, continued from page one

After 10 years, immigration officials sent him to detention. Held for nine months, Walid was moved from his home in Chicago to New Jersey, then Pennsylvania and finally Harlingen.

"It was like a nightmare," Walid says, noting that detainees have fewer rights than prisoners. When his case finally went to court, he received asylum quickly.

When Walid was released from detention, he came to La Posada. On his first evening here, he went for a walk. Many detainees feel a real need to get out and walk around. After being closed up in cells for so long, they relish the fresh air and freedom.



Client Coordinator Monica Peña-Rasmussen guided Walid through the steps necessary to move forward.

Unfortunately, Walid walked into a dangerous neighborhood, where he was severely beaten.

"Everyone was very sad when Walid was attacked, because it happened to one of our own," said Client Coordinator Monica Peña-Rasmussen. "Everyone here pitched in to help him recover. It was very touching: everything we strive to be, that's what we were at that time."

Walid now has a work permit and his social security card. Monica is helping him with the final piece, an identification card. The staff at La Posada "helped me do everything," Walid said, noting the shelter staff took him to the doctor and to all his appointments with lawyers, the court, the social security office, etc. "Everything

would be more difficult without them," he notes. "I didn't know the steps, the rules. Now I have my documents. I can move on."

"Considering all he has gone through, Walid still has the tenacity and spirit to do what he has to do," Monica said. "He is very intelligent and sensitive to others, very forgiving and mature. He wants to contribute to society."

What I Did On My Summer Vacation

By Janet Marcus

Looking for a way to be useful and practice my Spanish, I asked around for a place where I could volunteer. La Posada Providencia, in San Benito, Texas, was recommended and I was welcomed with open arms.

I stayed 19 days, helping to teach English, drive clients to and from appointments, shop for groceries, cook, clean and hang up laundry. I heard the stories of 17 people. Many were heartbreaking, and I shed tears hearing them. These included stories of abuse, murder, the loss of children, the sad distance of children left behind, female circumcision, threats to life, life on the streets, and harrowing escapes from near death on the seas.

The personalities were varied, reflecting in almost every one the resiliency of the human spirit, but also shock, anger, depression, and sometimes regression after finding themselves cared for, often for the first time in their young lives. Some arrive after months and sometimes more than a year in adult detention, rigid and bent after having sat for days on end.

The poverty the clients have experienced is beyond the understanding of most educated and well-fed Americans. These immigrants often have no experience with bedclothes, modern plumbing, and some forms of hygiene that we take for granted. All of these



Volunteer Janet Marcus demonstrates her knitting machine to clients.

are provided and explained.

Seeking ways to distract minds from troubles, I introduced some crafts: knitting on looms, beading, carving and drawing. I also lent an ear, providing the kind of moral support needed in the educational communities where I, a school psychologist, work.

The 19 days went by, filled with meaningful work, revelations, and fun. We went to Fourth of July celebrations. We went to the beach. And we made lasting friendships. The Sisters and I shared company, stories, and friendship. I miss La Posada and look forward to returning during my next summer vacation.

In April, board member Everett Driskill led members of the Wesley United Methodist Church Emmaus group to La Posada, equipped with serious tools and serious aspirations: to install a wheelchair ramp at the entrance to Casa Belen, our commons building. The hard work was accompanied by a jovial camaraderie and a shared joy in helping others. With the addition of the



ramp, the offices, main kitchen, dining room and classroom have now become handicap accessible.

Grape Expectations: A Drive for Hope

Fundraising Event to Support Client Dreams

In honor of our 20th anniversary, La Posada Providencia is hosting a party! A wine tasting and dinner to be precise.

Please join us on **Friday, November 6, 2009** at **Cooley's Classic Cars** (302 W. Jackson, Harlingen, Texas) for ***Grape Expectations: A Drive for Hope***.

Proceeds will benefit the immigrants and asylum seekers who find shelter and support at La Posada Providencia. Each of the clients we serve has great expectations for their new life in the United States. You can help fulfill their dreams by supporting this event.

The event will kick off with a wine tasting at 6:30 PM, followed by dinner and an auction. Cooley's Classic Cars is a fun venue and proves that some of us *do* get better with age!

For information or to order tickets, please contact Colleen Price at 314-209-9181 or cprice@divineprovidencesisters.org. Or contact Sister Zita Telkamp at La Posada, 956-399-3826.



The Short Journeys Count, Too

Walid (cover story) had to get to so many places! In addition to the doctor, Walid had to get to immigration court, the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Social Security office, and the Texas Department of Public Safety.

This need for transportation is typical of clients at La Posada. Add to the list lawyer and dentist offices, the pharmacy, the post office, Western Union and the bus station. Each day, La Posada staff drive 100 miles or more, transporting clients to all the places they need to be.

La Posada is the only shelter for immigrants in the Rio Grande Valley offering this kind of client-specific transportation. In 2008, our client transportation costs exceeded \$13,000. This spring we sent a letter seeking help for our transportation expenses. We offer sincere thanks to the 66 people who responded with a contribution. Your gifts totaled \$3,898.

As you can see, there remains a large gap between the cost of providing transportation and the amount received from our donors. If you can help, we would be very grateful to receive your donation. It is tax deductible. An envelope is enclosed for your convenience.



La Posada Providencia
A Sponsored Ministry of
The Sisters of Divine Providence
3415 Bridgeland Drive
Bridgeport, MO 63044



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