



**Sister Hilary Hooks, CDP**  
 First La Posada Providencia  
 Program Director, 1989  
 Page 4



**Welcoming  
 the Stranger**  
 — 1989-2019 —

2019



# New Beginnings

## La Posada Providencia Celebrates 30 Years in the Rio Grande Valley



*First La Posada Rented House in Harlingen - 1989*

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In the early 1980s, then Pope John Paul II called on all religious communities to extend their ministries to include aiding refugees and immigrants around the world. The Sisters of Divine Providence (CDPs) answered the Pope's call following their religious community's 1985 International Chapter appeal for volunteers to assist refugees worldwide. Former Sister Alice Lawler, CDP, became Executive Director for Proyecto Libertad, a paralegal agency helping refugees and working in tandem with South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR), a legal-aid agency for asylum seekers, in Harlingen, Texas. She communicated (from first-hand experience) the need to provide temporary shelter for immigrant and refugee clients of these pro-bono agencies. Before then, there was no place

for indigent and legally documented refugees to receive basic living assistance until resettlement could be arranged. It was not unusual for these clients to sleep on an office floor or at a paralegal's home. La Posada's first client, Teresa from El Salvador, arrived on December 1, 1989, and thus, La Posada began.

For 5½ years, La Posada Providencia (The Inn of Providence) moved from one temporary location to another, struggling to achieve permanency—similar to the plight of refugees seeking shelter. Then in 1995, La Posada settled into its fifth address, one that has become a permanent home in San Benito. It is a peaceful location, situated in the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas.

*Continued*



*At that table sat La Posada's first refugee guest on December 1, 1989, a woman from El Salvador, who shared that on that day, the feast of Divine Providence was celebrated in her country. "I accepted that as an affirmation of the ministry," said Sister Hilary.*



The ten-acre property was originally owned by a different congregation of women religious and was used to educate at-risk young girls. Later, the land was redeveloped and two pre-constructed buildings were added to the property: Casa Carolina, a women's dorm; and Casa Belen, the commons building with kitchen and dining facilities and office space for staff. These original buildings, near 90 years since constructed, are still in use as originally purposed. Casa Guillermo, a men's dorm; and a fourth

building that is rented were also on the property when purchased in 1995.

Later property additions have been made to accommodate growing demands for shelter services. They include a mobile home for the Sisters in residence, a mobile-unit-classroom and separate mobile buildings that serve as laundry and storage rooms, respectively. A large garage building and storage building for fundraisers have also been constructed. The most recent addition is a screened pavilion

that is used for volunteer events and presentations for large visiting groups.

Since La Posada's first client arrived in 1989, we have welcomed more than 10,000 clients originating from 86 different countries around the world – from countries as close as Central America to as far away as Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia. From our records, dating back to the year 2000, we know that 460 clients received asylum; we believe many more received asylum later in their immigration journey.

*Second rented house at the Sam Houston Blvd. location "We needed more space," said Sister Hilary.*



*Sister Hilary and client at the Sam Houston Blvd. location.*



*Typical meal time at the Sam Houston Blvd. location.*



In 2019 and for the foreseeable future, La Posada Providencia operates as a 24/7 emergency homeless shelter for men, women and families. Our clients have been oppressed in political conflicts, displaced after a natural disaster, or persecuted by life-threatening actions. Many have endured severe hardships, including extreme poverty, unjust imprisonment, even torture. They have minimal possessions and no money. They seek legal asylum or other legal recourse to begin new lives in this country.

Lengths of stay vary and are case-specific. Some clients stay with us for short stays (overnight or one to two days), while others can stay for several weeks, months or up to one year. Until clients are granted appropriate work authorizations, can secure employment and/or have appropriate recourse to resettle, La Posada provides their sole means of support. La Posada's programs offer care, hope, and a hand up.

Our shelter program provides for the immediate needs of our clients to ensure their safety, and provide clean shelter, food, shower and laundry facilities, computer and internet access, clothes and personal supplies for up to

25 people per day, mostly mothers with children.

Our case management program includes needs assessment, goal setting and facilitation of services to meet identified needs. Services include



*Volunteer Pavilion added in 2016.*

local transportation to and from off-site agencies (health care, legal aid and social services), access to on-site communication resources, assistance with travel and communications, filling out paperwork, translation assistance, English literacy, employment preparation, and life-skills education.

Over the years, changes to our programming have occurred due to government rules affecting immigrants, asylees and asylum seekers. For many years our clients stayed with us for longer stays (eight days and longer). They tended to be males. Now we have more women and children arriving for

shorter stays (overnight or two days).

From our earliest and most reliable data, we recorded serving 215 clients in 2000. Last year, in 2018, we welcomed 904 people, many of whom were families with children. Notwithstanding the changes to immigration rules, our

target population has remained the same as have our goals. We strive to welcome clients with hospitality, provide for their basic needs and guide them so they may make a lawful and effective resettlement.

Many thanks to the Sisters of Divine Providence for their perpetual prayers and financial support.

Sincere recognition and appreciation is to be afforded to La Posada's committed staff who work daily to make God's Providence visible to all those we serve. La Posada sustains itself through the work of its Development Office, Board of Directors, its many generous donors and faithful volunteers. Abundant gratitude for all the support received these many years.

With God's Providence, La Posada will continue to honor the gospel mandate to "welcome the stranger" for years to come.

*"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*



2019



2019



# Reflections from La Posada Providencia Program Directors, Past and Present



## Sister Hilary Hooks, CDP

La Posada Providencia  
Program Director  
1989 to 1995

Having watched La Posada Providencia grow from a single small neighborhood dwelling in Harlingen, Texas to what it is now, I sometimes feel awestruck. I so

admire the perseverance of Sisters Zita and Margaret, as well as Sister Thérèse and all the staff for staying with the ministry through all the difficult and easy times, and I know that God is the one who continues to fire their hearts with the love of serving such desperate people.

I cannot forget, either, those who were the inspiration for beginning La Posada. In the mid 1980s, Sister De La Salle

Mahler, CDP, General Superior of the Sisters of Divine Providence, called the CDP Community's attention to the terrible plight of refugees throughout the world. Former Sister Alice Lawler, CDP, answered that call in the spirit of the Community's cofounder Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler, and became the director of Proyecto Libertad (Project Liberty) which represented detained refugees seeking asylum in South Texas. It was Sister Alice who requested that the Sisters of Divine Providence sponsor a shelter for the agency's refugee clients who needed shelter while undergoing their legal process. Sister Alice saw to the beginning of the shelter by appealing for a volunteer director. I, Sister Hilary, became the director, and with the help of former Sister Charlene Figge, CDP, developed funding to keep the shelter sustainable until a development office could be established. Following Sister Charlene, there have since been two Development Directors, Cathy Cullen and Ana Schulz, the latter whom continues to serve as La Posada's Development Director.

Because of the interest and support the shelter has acquired in the country throughout these 30 years, my hope is that it will be able to continue to serve refugees as long as the need exists. For me, La Posada Providencia reflects the sentiment in Emma Lazarus' sonnet at the foot of the Statue of Liberty:

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

I will always feel privileged to have had a small part in helping to bring about the initiation of this significant ministry of the Sisters of Divine Providence.



*Casa Belen  
undergoing  
renovation  
in 1995*



*A gathering for a  
blessing of La Posada  
Providencia; newly  
purchased property  
by the Sisters of  
Divine Providence  
in 1995.*



## Sister Margaret Mertens, CDP

La Posada Providencia  
Program Director  
1995 to 2008

Before becoming the Program Director in 1995, I visited La Posada from where I lived and taught in St. Louis, Missouri. My trips were to volunteer. From that volunteer experience, I developed a deep connection to the people in the lower Rio Grande Valley and to the vulnerable population the ministry served. I immersed myself in the language and became conversant and able to communicate effectively.

It was not a hard transition to go from volunteer to Program Director when the opportunity presented itself. I was in love with the people and the ministry.

Immigration policies were quite different in the mid-1990s. It was less complicated. Clients seeking asylum stayed at La Posada for long periods of time as their case progressed, allowing time to get to know the clients and to have the opportunity to spend more time teaching them life-skills. Now



there are more people to serve than before, most of whom stay for shorter periods of time.

A founding principle of the Sisters is that we minister to meet the needs of the times and that is truly what La Posada continues to do today. In 1989, migrants were in crisis and

now more than 30 years later, we are witnessing another worldwide migrant crisis. My hope and my prayer for La Posada's future is that it continues to build on the legacy the Sisters established with its founding – that its vision always encompass the values of compassion, justice and peace.



## Sister Zita Telkamp, CDP

La Posada Providencia  
Program Director  
2008 to present

Beginning in 2003, a few times each year, I had the opportunity to come from St. Louis, Missouri to volunteer at La Posada for two or three weeks. I felt I was so fortunate; I considered it a privilege to participate in La Posada's ministry and mission that responds to the Gospel mandate "to welcome the stranger." I always looked forward to my next visit.

In June of 2008, I was no longer a visitor/volunteer and moved to La Posada permanently to serve first as interim Program Director and a few months later, La Posada's Board of Directors approved my position as permanent Program Director—a position that I continue to hold. During my eleven years as Program Director, there have been many challenges/changes and blessings. These three have been among the most outstanding challenges/changes:

- A month after my arrival, I was "welcomed" by Hurricane Dolly that wreaked havoc on our property with fallen trees and damaged roofs on all four of our 90-year old buildings that took a few months to repair; their upkeep is still a challenge.
- The number of refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers we served in fiscal year 2009 was 149; the majority of whom were adult men. Last year, in 2018, we welcomed 904 people, nearly 30% of whom were families with children.



- Immigration policies have changed drastically separating families by sending husbands to detention—deporting a few and releasing their wives and children, sometimes with no place to go except transporting them to La Posada.

Among the countless blessings I have experienced during my eleven years as Program Director and to whom I owe recognition and gratitude:

- The Sisters of Divine Providence of my Province, who every Saturday continue to pray for the staff and clients at La Posada and who have provided invaluable financial support.
- Our dedicated staff who work as a team to make God's Providence visible to all those we serve. La Posada could not exist without our Development Office, our Board of Directors, our many generous donors and our faithful volunteers.

As to my hopes for La Posada's future. . .

The founder of our religious community, Bishop Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler's motto was "to meet the needs of our times." As I reflect on my eleven years of "meeting the needs of our times" in La Posada's 30-year legacy of addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people in the world, our refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers, I feel how privileged and blessed I was and am!

La Posada Providencia has been, is presently, and will continue the legacy of doing God's work in "meeting the needs of our times" because immigration will continue.

*"For if the plan or work is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow it."*

*Acts 4:38*





# La Posada's ESL and Life Skills Education for Clients

Commemorating La Posada's 30-Year Anniversary would be incomplete without acknowledging the contributions of Sister Thérèse Cunningham, SHSp, who in 2005, filled the position of Client Mentor. Her religious community is the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate, located in San Antonio, Texas.

As Client Mentor, Sister Thérèse directs the shelter's English as a Second Language (ESL) and Life-Skills curriculum. She developed the curriculum and is the lead instructor. Sister spends as many as five hours daily instructing clients in formal class situations and in individual tutoring. As the number of arriving clients has grown, Sister has been blessed with the help of volunteer ESL tutors.

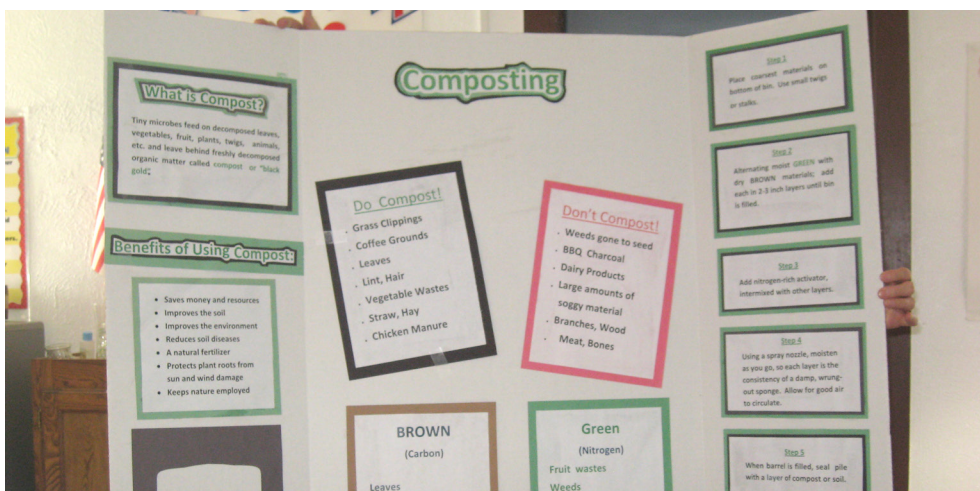
Formal ESL classes are now held in a mobile unit classroom onsite four hours a day, Monday – Friday. The ESL instruction considers that many arriving clients have sporadically attended school, possess different levels of English literacy, come from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and will reside in shelter for varying lengths of stay.

Sister Thérèse also incorporates experiential life skills learning opportunities to work in tandem with the ESL classes. A variety of topics are covered from basic understanding of U.S. money systems to practicing preventive healthcare to composting and recycling. La Posada's 10-acre site provides ample opportunity for experiential learning in these areas.

Creating and leading La Posada's ESL and Life-Skills curriculum was not

and is not a small endeavor. As one of our ESL volunteers aptly puts it "Sister Thérèse, in the classroom, has a Holy Spirit directed gift of finding everyone's English level and adjusting the lessons to fit the needs."

When asked to reflect on what La Posada's 30th anniversary means to her, she said, "Being a part of the 30-year La Posada journey on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters has been for me a graced experience full of challenges and blessings as we reach out to welcome and reverence some of the most vulnerable members of society. I am inspired by the faith of the people we serve here at La Posada and I am deeply grateful to the Sisters of Divine Providence for their courage and compassion in beginning this ministry 30 years ago and for welcoming me as part of their staff 13 1/2 years ago."





# Volunteers — Our Village



*First Baptist Church of Washington, D.C. with Sisters Zita (fifth from right) and Margaret (far right)*



**Project Transformation  
— Rio Texas  
Conference United  
Methodist Church**

*Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to keep our shelter safe and operational. We are grateful for all of our volunteers, and give a special shout out to our regular seasonal volunteers and larger groups who come and accomplish many things in a short period of time. (Those pictured are returning seasonal volunteers and students.) Groups of volunteers who come are often church and civic groups and students. During short stays — one to two days — volunteer groups tackle projects like assembling furniture, laying concrete paths, painting and garden maintenance. Our seasonal volunteers who return year after year take on all duties as needed.*

*These are a representative list of the Visiting Volunteer Groups since July 1, 2018:*

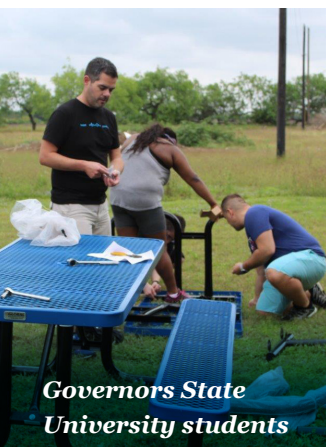
*American University, Washington D.C.; DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois; First Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.; First Christian Church, McKinney, Texas; First United Methodist Church of East Bernard, Texas; Girl Scout Troop #109, Harlingen, Texas; Governors State University, Chicago, Illinois; Grace Presbyterian Church - Plano, Texas; La Roche College, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Project Transformation — a ministry of Rio Texas Conference United Methodist Church; North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas; ProBAR, Harlingen, Texas; St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas; St. Teresa of Avila, Chicago, Illinois; Southwest Good Samaritan Ministries, Los Fresnos, Texas; University of California at Berkeley; University of Texas — Rio Grande Valley, Brownsville, Texas; Westlake United Methodist Church, Austin, Texas*

*We are so very appreciative for these and all of our volunteers that helped and continue to help us make La Posada the caring and healing place that it is for so many. They are our heroes. Without our volunteers, we would not be able to make the difference we do in the lives of the men, women and children we serve at our shelter.*

*If you or someone you know would like to assist us every day, a few days, an extended stay or for just one day, please call us at 956-399-3826. We would like to have your name and email so we can call on you when needed.*



**Intern Cindy Bernal**



**Governors State  
University students**



**Seasonal volunteer  
Andy Hudak**





# Carrying the Legacy Forward

## Magda Bolland

La Posada Providencia  
Executive Director

Recently, I visited the Pioneer Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas, a town founded by German immigrants. The museum layout successfully describes the journey of an immigrant family and the motives behind deciding to pack the essentials and move to the other side of the world. Most of them were looking for freedom, wishing to escape poverty and oppressive governments. The stories of the German settlers from one hundred years ago are similar to the stories of La Posada's clients today.

Just as with La Posada today, German pioneers 173 years ago had common buildings composed of a kitchen, a diner, dorms, classrooms, a pantry, a smokehouse, etc. where travelers could stop for a meal, a shower, and to rest before continuing their journey. History is a sweet reminder that migration is part of the human condition over centuries and it makes me happy that La Posada's ministry helps cover the basic needs of migrants at their most vulnerable state.

I feel honored to continue the Sisters of Divine Providence's 30-year legacy; working and learning from Sister Zita, Sister Margaret, and Sister Thérèse is a great privilege. My hope is that La Posada continues to be a resting place where migrants can find peace, food, lodging, and education. I also hope our clients leave feeling empowered to continue the arduous journey ahead. I dream of a shift of mindset in society and that more people are able to appreciate migrants' culture and contributions.

In the meantime, La Posada's staff will continue planting seeds of compassion as we spread the La Posada story far and wide. And, as we build on the rich history of experience and knowledge gained over the past 30 years, we will endeavor to better serve our growing numbers of clients.

Last, but not least, the La Posada family of Sisters, Board of Directors, staff and clients acknowledge and appreciate that without Divine Providence and the generosity of our past and present donors these 30 years would not be possible. We endeavor to maintain your trust and support for the future success of this great ministry and carrying the legacy forward.

## Staff

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Program Director

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Development Director

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Grants Compliance Coordinator

**Monica Peña-Rasmussen**  
Client Coordinator

**Colleen Price**  
Database and Information Manager

**Michelle Yates**  
HMIS Data Entry Specialist

**Sister Thérèse Cunningham, SHSp**  
Client Mentor

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These donations were received between July 1, 2018 and April 30, 2019.

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## La Posada Providencia

*A Sponsored Ministry of  
The Sisters of Divine Providence*

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### *Mission Statement*

La Posada Providencia, founded and sponsored by the Sisters of Divine Providence, is a ministry for people in crisis from around the world who are seeking legal refuge in this country. The shelter staff provides a safe and welcoming home; mentors to promote self-sufficiency and cultural integration; and imparts values which witness God's Providence in our world.

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## La Posada Providencia's 10th Annual Brunch and Auction!

**February 8, 2020**

**La Sierra Event Center**

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Nine years and counting this event has proven to be a morning of joy with the added benefit of helping those in need. Please join us. Look for details in the coming weeks and months on Facebook.com/LPPShelter and on our website LPPShelter.org.