Opinion

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Honduran Ariel, 19, prays at a shelter in Tijuana, Mexico, March 19, 2019. He is among dozens of migrants seeking asylum in the United States who are awaiting a court hearing on their request for asylum after having been returned to Mexico under a new federal policy. (CNS photo/Jorge Duenes, Reuters)



by Mary Ann McGivern

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I was very glad to read the NCR article "Bishops Decry Border Emergency." It catches a sense of the work everyone is doing to respond to the immediate suffering of migrants. My community, Loretto, is in El Paso, and we've been able to provide some space for migrants in an unused wing of the infirmary next door and also in the school gym. Some sisters and other volunteers who come to help have been staying in space that once was our convent.

Ruben Garcia, the director of Annunciation House and the coordinator of the work in El Paso, has issued requests for help, and religious communities have responded, body and soul. When I went to the School of the Americas Watch demonstration in Nogales, AZ, I was planning to write about the sisters who come there every year, but this year there were not so many. Someone said that's because they are all at the border, meeting the migrants. I think so.

The border sites where the Border Patrol is releasing migrant families — some say dumping them on the streets and at bus stations with no support services — these sites all need volunteers who speak Spanish. They need clothes, small sizes, especially underwear. (One of our sisters who doesn't speak Spanish worked in the clothing room. Grande, grandewas the first Spanish phrase she learned. The migrants need travel-sized toiletries. They need food. They need shelter. Catholic Charities, local bishops, Annunciation House and other centers have been renting entire motels to house migrants while they get in touch with family and get tickets to travel on the last stage of the journey.

One bus from McAllen, TX, stops every day in Louisville for 20 minutes and communities there meet the bus each day with sandwiches, blankets, jackets and whatever else they might have on hand that day. I only know because one of the communities is Loretto, meeting the bus every Sunday. Across the country people of good will are stepping up, doing what we can.

This border effort needs money. Several of my friends and I have celebrated our birthdays on Facebook by linking to donation sites collecting for Annunciation House. It is a simple way to raise a little money, bit by bit, and tell our friends and family

what is happening. Of course, checks sent directly are good. Signs in our yards that declare we welcome immigrants are a way of inviting others to be welcoming, too. There's a lot to be done and together we are doing it.

[Mary Ann McGivern, a Sister of Loretto, works with people who have felony convictions and advocates for criminal justice. She lived at a Catholic Worker house for 28 years. She has been a public radio commentator and written plays and a cookbook. She lives in St. Louis.]

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