Opinion
Guest Voices



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Over the past several months I have listened to, recorded and accompanied the testimonies of migrant women serving as catechists in parishes across Southern California. These narratives are part of a pastoral and theological project aimed at understanding how they live their faith amidst displacement and the kind of spiritual leadership they provide, often with no recognition.

Many arrived in the United States fleeing poverty or violence, carrying children, fears and a faith that seemed to be the only stable thing in their lives. Today they coordinate groups, prepare families for the sacraments, translate the Word into simple language, pray with other mothers and accompany those who suffer.

One of them told me in a hushed tone after an interview: "Sometimes I feel like the church uses me, but doesn't see me."

She spoke without resentment, with that blend of tenderness and clarity that only emanates from a woman who has loved without measure.

> In this country, where they are marginalized and considered suspect, catechesis becomes an act of dignity; a space where they can say, "I too have something sacred to offer."
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Since then, I have heard dozens of similar stories. Her words echo within me incessantly, and I have come to understand that to stay silent would be a betrayal; a betrayal to them, to the truth, to the Gospel embodied in their displaced bodies.

Ruth: A migratory and ecclesial reading

In the stories of these women — fragmented by borders, fear, hope and faith — the narrative of Ruth and Naomi resonates powerfully. Two migrants, one a widow and the other a foreigner, accompany each other through loss and seek to rebuild their lives through mutual fidelity.

Ruth did not "teach catechism," but her gesture of radical fidelity ("Your people shall be my people, and your God my God") might be one of the earliest forms of

experiential catechesis: A lived, embodied, committed act of belonging.

This is how many of the women I've interviewed live. They don't "teach" catechism; they weave experiences of faith through words, gestures and presence in improvised classrooms, parish courtyards and whispers after Mass. They are foreigners like Ruth, and also spiritual mothers like Naomi. They give of themselves without knowing if they will be received, and yet they sow.

Some do so in communities that don't fully recognize them. Others, within norms that deny them access to the sacraments. But they persist, creating spaces of hospitality and meaning where the institutional church sometimes fails to reach.

Like Ruth, these women not only walk alongside others, they transform the ground they tread upon.

Migration, faith and ecclesial silences

Migrant women serving as catechists often do so from the margins, living without legal documentation, job security or free time. After cleaning houses, caring for children, waiting tables or sewing in factories, they arrive at their parish to share the one thing that hasn't been taken from them: their faith.

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Migrant women uphold an embodied pastoral ministry that doesn't appear in reports or leadership meetings. These women coordinate sacramental preparation groups, accompany mothers who cannot read, support adolescents navigating two languages, visit the sick, lead celebrations and translate what formal language fails to convey. And they do this voluntarily. With love. With tenderness. With commitment. But without institutional support; without a voice in pastoral decisions.

The church needs them, but often fails to name them, listen to them, form or care for them.

Migrant women serve the church because they believe; because they have been touched by a living Word that gave them meaning; because someone once looked upon them with mercy, and they wish to do the same for others.

But they also do it — though they may not say it — to resist.

Because in this country, where they are marginalized and considered suspect, catechesis becomes an act of dignity; a space where they can say, "I too have something sacred to offer."

When we retell the story of faith in this country, let us not forget their names.

Those who organized catechesis circles in borrowed classrooms and parish kitchens.
Those who opened Scripture to heal the wounds no one else inquired about.
Those who accompanied others while silently bearing their own exile.
Those who embodied the catechism through their bodies, memories and sacred wounds.

If we leave them out of the story, if we stay silent, we betray the Gospel.