News



Missionary priest Fr. Raymond Riding hugs two little girls at a Mass hastily organized on June 27 in Tucson, Arizona, to support Venezuelan migrants who are worried and in mourning after two devastating earthquakes killed hundreds of people and injured thousands more in their homeland on June 24. (Anita Snow)



by Anita Snow

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Tucson, Arizona — July 8, 2026
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Fr. Raymond Riding stood behind the altar of the small mission church, writing names called out by Venezuelan migrants as they listed family members and friends killed, hurt or missing in a recent pair of devastating earthquakes.

"We are going to put their names on this paper and leave them here for Jesus," Riding told a dozen families gathered June 27 at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish, three days after the 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes killed more than 3,500 people and injured thousands more.

From the altar that featured Venezuela's yellow, blue and red flag, the missionary priest assured the migrants that God would accompany them through the dark valley described in the 23rd Psalm.

"Jesus' arms are always open on the cross," Riding told them. "It's not the cross that saves us. It's Jesus with his open arms."

Long before the Trump administration's current deportation campaign pushed immigration issues to center stage, Catholic priests and laypeople have been dedicating themselves to quietly accompany and attend to the pastoral needs of migrants navigating new lives in the United States.

"Whether it's visiting people in prison, or attending celebrations, it's accompaniment," said Riding, a member of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, a congregation of priests and men religious that ministers to the poor in the United States, Latin America and the Caribbean. "It's what Jesus did and what he wants us to do."

Dominican Fr. Brendan Curran of Chicago, recently visiting southern Arizona for a binational Mass to honor migrants, said he is inspired by such ministries that meet critical needs without fanfare.

"There is a lot of heroic unsung work that goes on," said Curran, who represented the International Dominican Commission for Justice and Peace and the community

nonprofit The Resurrection Project. "We have pastors in Chicago who drive hours to be with imprisoned immigrants in Michigan because that is what they are called to do."



Fr. Raymond Riding of the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity celebrates Mass on June 27 at the St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish in Tucson, Arizona to support Venezuelan migrants who are worried and in mourning after two devastating earthquakes in their homeland on June 24. (Anita Snow)

Tucson-based Deacon Mike Gutierrez, who works with Kolbe Prison Ministries, also provides pastoral care to incarcerated migrants in southern Arizona, sometimes in partnership with Riding.

With two volunteer laypeople, Gutierrez holds regular services in English and Spanish at two immigration detention centers in the state. He also visits inmates at

state and federal prisons, city jails, U.S. Marshals facilities and on death row.

"We pray with them and we try to give them hope," said Gutierrez, who was recently honored for his work with the national St. Dismas Award, named for "the good thief" pardoned by Jesus.

Every Tuesday, Riding also drives an hour or two to celebrate Mass, hear confessions and pray with detained immigrants about their hearings.

"I don't want to do just sacraments. I want it to be more personal," said Riding. "Sometimes we get so wrapped up in the ritual we forget about the importance of presence."

Now 78, Riding has spent most of his half-century as a priest ministering to Spanish-speaking people, including at a mission in the central Mexican state of Hidalgo, and at an AIDS hospice in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

During his two years in Tucson, Riding has also monitored immigration court hearings, prayed with deported people at the U.S.-Mexico border and joined migrant families for celebrations such as a children's party marking Epiphany and a recent summer camp for kids.

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At the Mass for Venezuela, the migrants expressed gratitude to Riding and advocate Dora Rodriguez, who frequently partners with the priest through her nonprofit group Salvavision. Rodriguez herself is a former migrant from El Salvador who almost died in 1980 when smugglers abandoned her group without food or water as they crossed the blistering Arizona desert.

Venezuelan migrant Cesar, his wife and their five children have looked to Salvavision for housing and other assistance as they wait for an asylum hearing after being allowed in the United States two years ago.

Cesar said the deadly earthquakes on June 24 have added another layer of stress and uncertainty to their lives. His wife's cousin, the cousin's spouse and that couple's two children, were killed in Venezuela's hard-hit coastal state of La Guaira.

"This is a blessing," Cesar said of the gathering, which included Venezuelan food prepared by his wife. "They are like our family here. They have been very concerned with us in every way."

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.