

How Churches at the Border Respond to the Immigration Crisis

Far from the battle in Washington over humanitarian funding for the border crisis, believers on both sides of the Rio Grande are coming together to care for the thousands of asylum seekers hoping to receive a legal pathway into the US.

In El Paso, Sami DiPasquale, the executive director of Ciudad Nueva, a faith-based community outreach center, says 30 local churches have united in recent months to care for as many as 1,000 new migrants released by U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) every day. "They've been hosting. They've been donating materials. They've been activating their denominations," said DiPasquale.

Tiny El Elyon, a neighborhood congregation in El Paso, has taken in 70 migrants every night for months.

But in mid-June, El Elyon and other shelters here abruptly learned that ICE would no longer be dropping off migrants at their front door, as had been the daily pattern.

"We used to do this every single day, seven days a week," said Pastor Maribel Velazquez. "I was always depending on the Lord and saying, 'Lord, what do you want me to do? It's a multitude of people that need us.'"

Faith leaders in El Paso believe that President Trump's new "Remain in Mexico" policy may be the reason why El Paso is now just receiving several hundred migrants a day. The policy has encouraged Mexican police to deter immigrants from entering the country's southern border and from trying to cross the border. It has also led U.S. authorities to send asylum-seekers back to Mexico to wait on their immigration court

hearings.

Leaders from the Evangelical Immigration Table (EIT) toured the El Paso border last weekend in a visit sponsored by the National Immigration Forum, a Washington, D.C., think tank.

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