

# Beyond Borders

## A Call to Serve the Immigrant

BY MARTA RODRÍGUEZ

“... let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

—1 John 3:18

In April 2008 a group of Presbyterian women accepted the call to learn about the compassion and tenderness, the justice and mercy of God, by participating in the first Presbyterian Women U.S.A. Mission Experience. As we gathered in El Paso, most of us meeting each other for the first time, we quickly realized a shared, common bond: the eagerness to learn and experience how immigration affects the lives of millions of people on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. We also wanted to understand how this issue relates to violence, poverty, racism, and exploitation of women and children, and how our policies affect immigrants' lives.

El Paso is located in the westernmost part of Texas. It is the largest border city in North America and, along with Ciudad Juárez, forms a metropolitan area of nearly 2 million people. The first three days spent in El Paso gave us a glimpse of how the U.S. government enforces immigration laws as well as how the PC(USA) and the local community work to help immigrants.

As we crossed the border to Juárez, cardboard shacks were visible, with million-dollar mansions as a backdrop. Hundreds of *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) were easily detected. The *maquiladoras* are the places of employment for most women living in the area. These women often are recruited into oppressive working conditions, receiving little pay. We were able to meet a group of sisters who work at the *maquiladoras* and bear witness to their testimonies. They admitted that these factories provide jobs but also are associated with many

social problems afflicting the city, like domestic violence, children abandoned in the streets, and the disappearance of hundreds of local women.

Our meeting with the women of Chihuahua Presbytery was like an oasis in the desert. We had the opportunity to share experiences, joys and concerns, as well as listen to their goals and dreams. We promised to continue working in partnership with them. We invited four of them to participate in the Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women in July 2009.

As we returned to our homes, we promised ourselves we would never stop hearing the cries of our sisters and would respond with compassion; we would work for the end of all forms of violence, advocate for the rights of women and children, support our domestic partners and allow ourselves to be transformed by partnership experiences.

**Prayer:** Loving God; you are full of compassion and tenderness. We thank you for the countless blessings we receive every day. Merciful Lord, you encourage and impel us to act on behalf of your children, those who need special care and love. Help us rise up to this responsibility in love and respect for one another. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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