

Immigration Summit 2019

The Immigration Summit was hosted by Lydia Patterson Institute (LPI) on November 21-22, 2019. It was attended by five bishops and approximately 40 other representatives from the UMC Immigration Task Force, General Boards and other United Methodist organizations, focused on improving the safety and well-being of immigrants on our southern border.

During the opening session, we were welcomed by the LPI President, Dr. Socorro Brito de Anda; the Binational Affairs Director, Juan Acereto; El Paso Mayor, Dee Margo; and El Paso DS, Rev. Eddie Rivera. (Unfortunately, Bishop Bledsoe had been delayed by travel issues.) LPI held a rousing chapel service featuring their students and a message from the Chaplain, Santiago Heredia. We were also treated to a tour of the facilities. LPI students are held to high academic standards, using the best in educational technology.

Our group was transported across the border to Juarez, where we began our tour with the Immigration Center. Triny Rivera and several government representatives who work on humanitarian issues on both sides of the border, described how immigrants oftentimes post their names on several lists to better their chances of being called for their immigration interview. El Calvario UMC volunteers were serving lunch in the center.

We visited the cold and wet tent city where immigrants stay close to the border. El Calvario feed people there each week and volunteers play with and teach the children. On this day, volunteers were playing with bubbles and giving out books.

We had a Policia escort to visit the El Buen Samaritano shelter in Juarez. We were addressed by the Bishop Felip Ruiz Aguilar and Juarez DS, Rev. Ruben Pero Rivera. We toured the facilities and met several immigrant guests. Dinner was back in the US, where we were entertained by the LPI Mariachis and informed by Las Americas Advocacy Center Executive Director, Linda Rivas.

On Friday morning, Karin Carlson, Pastor of Mackey Chapel and FUMC in Odessa started us off with a "D-6" devotional. Congresswoman Veronica Escobar exhorted us that our job was to "fight against the post 9-11 narrative and rehumanize immigrants." We heard from a panel of Ruben Garcia, Annunciation House Executive Director; Robert Moore, El Paso Journalist, and Hannah Hollandbyrd, The Hope Border Institute. They told us of the realities and challenges faced by immigrants and how we are complicit.

Lunch was hosted by Morningstar UMC in Las Cruces. Congresswoman Xochitl Torres Small introduced her mom, who we had met previously as one of the volunteers playing with children in the tent city in Juarez. Following lunch, we toured El Calvario UMC and the Borderland Hospitality House, both are in the midst of renovations to create more sustainable shelter for immigrants.

Our dinner and prayer service were held at Trinity-First UMC. LPI students greeted us warmly and served dinner. Bishop Bledsoe presented the message "Come and See". All five bishops provided the benediction after a memorable two days. Thanks to organizers: DS, Eddie Rivera, Rev. Nicole Crouch, Jenna Johnson and everyone who helped to make this a challenging, thought-provoking, well-organized event.

The UMNS covered the event. We will offer more information as well as their reporting shortly.