

LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS
2019 ASSEMBLY – SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA

Acceptance of the 2019 LCWR Outstanding Leadership Award
By Sister Norma Pimentel, MJ

Thank you. *Muchas gracias.*

I am so amazingly pleased to be among you and as one of you. together we are making a difference in our world today who we are and what we do at the Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley Humanitarian Respite Center

1. What Is Happening Today:

Today we find ourselves with a sense of unrest for the extreme hatred and human suffering in our world

A reality that is divisive and polarizing our communities.

As religious women, we are called to be present in the midst of this painful global setting. With the opportunity to witness to others a compassionate, radical & prophetic presence

I am convinced that our presence as religious women is to transform the world simply by the moral character we represent and gentle presence in upholding the dignity and care of all human life.

We must continue to inspire the best of everyone.

Our job is to bring together everyone that believes and agrees that respect for human dignity is a must.

I have personally witnessed the success of this philosophy in McAllen, Texas. Where we have all joined together as one community: all faith denominations, city government, border patrol, everyone, In restoring human dignity to immigrant brothers & sister.

Pope Francis certainly calls us to defend and preserve the dignity of all in pursuit of the common good. (As a disciple of the Word of God, Pope Francis is telling us that we are all called to join in this task.)

2. My Experience at the Border

I have seen the face full of tears of the child saying to me: "*ayúdame!* (Help me!)

I have seen the mom walking through the doors of the humanitarian respite center and break into tears as she experiences the compassionate welcoming of volunteers saying "*bienvenidos!*"

I have looked at the face of a three-year old child, come up to me in the late hours of the day and ask: *"tienes un pantalón limpio, el que traigo lo horiné."* (Do you have a clean pair of pants, the ones I have on are stained with urine.)

I have witnessed time and time again, a father kneeling before an image of Jesus or of our Lady, crying as they talk to them with the most beautiful prayer of thanksgiving. I know we are all wanting to be there for them.

I learned an important lesson that helped define who I am today.

Many years ago, one of my first assignments was to work at Casa Oscar Romero, the first sanctuary sponsored by the Diocese of Brownsville for Central American refugees. On our way to lunch one day, my mentor Sister Juliana Garcia wanted us to go show our support to a group who were at the congressmen's office speaking in defense of the people we were helping at the refugee shelter. Soon after we arrived, the police came to arrest everyone. Sister Juliana turned to me and said: "Norma, when you believe in something and you run away when things get tough, then you don't stand for anything. You are no one. No eres nadie."

"We can't both get arrested. Someone has to take care of the shelter. So, you decide." I looked at her and remember thinking to myself that I was the younger one, (I was 25) so I replied, "I guess it's me." She nodded in agreement and said "okay bye" and left!

As funny as this sounds, it was a decisive moment in my life. It was defining who I was, what I stand for, and how much I am willing to do for others.

3. What We Are Called to Do Now in This Moment

When we see and hear how terribly unjust so many are treated by those who fail to recognize the sacredness of human life.

And who fail to recognize the responsibility of all people of good will to protect, defend and uphold all human life.

It is now, my sisters, that we must ask ourselves what else can I do to change this world to one that is more caring and compassionate.

- If it is not now, when?
- If it not you, then who?
- For extreme times of pain and suffering, extreme measures of love are needed!
- Let us continue to do our part and get others to do the same.