

Intake Transformation

Not everyone in our diocesan office was elated about receiving over 50 asylum seekers in our very beautiful Bosque Retreat center. These people had been described as murderers, rapists, and drug dealers.

At about 1:00PM, the ICE buses arrived after the four-hour drive from El Paso. The passengers were very dirty, dehydrated, and hungry. The contrast between them and the armed ICE guards in their snappy uniforms was startling. Young men and women still clinging to their government-issued aluminum blankets were carrying children as young as 18 months old, some were pregnant and some were teenagers. Their faces were black with the filth of sleeping on pavement under bridges after weeks of travel – mostly walking.

The St Michael's volunteers – most probably twice the age of the migrants – interviewed the migrants for their legal and sponsor information to arrange travel, gave them fresh fruit, snacks, and drink. The migrants picked out clean clothes from donations for their families, and were given diapers, soap, razors, toothbrushes, and toothpaste. Belts and shoelaces were available to replace those taken away by ICE when they crossed the border. Volunteers showed migrants to private rooms where they were able to take showers and rest. A nurse or doctor saw them if they were ill, and volunteers called sponsors across the country to arrange the travel out in the next few days.

At dinner time, volunteers, diocesan staff, and migrants went to the retreat center dining room to share a home-cooked meal. Our priest said a blessing which was translated to Spanish and Portuguese. A staffer looked around the room of cleaned-up families on their way to new lives across the country, breaking bread with volunteers and diocesan staff. It could have been Denny's. He said, "So this is 'the enemy!'"