



MY BACKGROUND

My name is Kathryn Ophardt. I am going into my second year at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary to pursue a Master of Divinity. I graduated from Wittenberg University with a degree in Spanish and Sociology. Then, I did a year of service through the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America as a Young Adult in Global Mission, where I served with Casa Refugiados. There, I felt the call to ministry more clearly. In the future, I hope to be a pastor or chaplain for the Presbyterian Church. My passion for ministry is fueled by my background in Spanish and Sociology, through which I hope to help build the Kingdom of God in midst of our cultural contexts, not despite them.

REACH ME AT:

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PILOT CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM AT CASA REFUGIADOS



DEAR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS,

Thank you for accompanying Refuge of the Heart on this journey. In many ways, this journey began a long time ago, but now my feet are literally on the ground. I am in Mexico City, self-quarantining from my travels to get here, and have been asked to start work on Refuge of the Heart immediately! Casa Refugiados is continuing to serve asylum seekers in Mexico through virtual platforms, and they want me to do the same. This is a full month ahead of schedule, but I eagerly embrace the opportunity. While I finish the last two weeks of my first year of seminary which keeps my head in the books, I am energized by ministry that speaks to the world around us. Our world is overwhelmed by a pandemic, afraid to connect with their neighbor, and aching in heart, mind, body, and spirit. And yet, our world is also adapting, growing, and hopeful. In Refuge of the Heart, I hope to create space both for people to express their laments as well as their hopes and praise.

Refuge of the Heart is a pilot chaplaincy program. That is to say, Refuge of the Heart offers interfaith spiritual accompaniment, whether that is through prayer, meditation, compassionate listening, or connecting someone to a local faith community. I call it a pilot program because my goal is to help gauge interest in spiritual accompaniment both by the team at



ACCOMPANIMENT THROUGH PRAYER:

Part of the goal of Refuge of the Heart is to bridge our communities by praying for one another. If you have any prayer requests that you would like me to lift up, please contact me and I will gladly keep you in prayer as well.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Please pray for all the people in movement, that they may move safely.

Please pray for the people who don't feel safe where they are, that they may find refuge in large and small ways.

Please pray for Mexico City and all the people who live here as we enter into the peak of the pandemic.

Please pray for health, recovery, and wholeness.

Please pray for me as begin work on Refuge of the Heart, that I may have the kindness and wisdom to accompany people well.

Casa Refugiados and by the asylum seekers. My hope is that if people benefit from Refuge of the Heart, then Casa Refugiados might consider hiring a chaplain full time.

Refuge of the Heart was inspired by the migrant caravans that came through in October-December 2019 while I was doing a year of service with Casa Refugiados. I was inspired by all of the clergy members who went to the stadium where thousands of people were staying. The first day, they offered a prayer service and about 20 people came. The next day, they went out and offered another prayer service and hundreds of people came! Casa Refugiados does amazing work in accompanying people who seek asylum in Mexico, starting day-one when they solicit asylum. They help them through the legal process, support them in finding a job. In a nutshell, Casa Refugiados accompanies people as they establish themselves in their new home. They do as much as they can to accompany people up until their support is no longer needed. I learned so much from their model of accompaniment, but I realized that there is a need for spiritual accompaniment, not just during the most dramatic times of crisis, but in all times.

In that caravan season, the asylum seekers were not the only ones who were overwhelmed. The team at Casa Refugiados was pushed to its limits and signs of burnout became more and more prevalent. I was inspired to develop Refuge of the Heart to support the people who serve in Casa Refugiados as well as the people who are served in Casa Refugiados. The reality is that all people need a place to rest. All people need a refuge.

I am honored that Casa Refugiados would ask me to start a month early with Refuge of the Heart. In some ways, starting virtually is strange, and yet, at the same time it seems appropriate. Hopefully, starting spiritual accompaniment virtually will demonstrate that anywhere can be a refuge if you have a moment to breathe, rest, and reorient toward God.

I hope you find time in these coming days to breathe and rest in God as well.

Love and peace,
Kathryn Ophardt



Casa Refugiados