



## Sister Lupita: An incarnated heart in the migrant people

Story by Juan Carlos Farias-Gonzalez | Pictures by José Astúa

There is a passage in holy Scripture about the calling of God to Abraham our father in the faith, that says: “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you, I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you.” (Gen 12:1-3). Sister Guadalupe Moreno had to live this same experience. She has given 40

years of religious life to ministering to migrant workers and the residents of our Diocese mainly in Oceana County in the Hart and Shelby areas at St. Gregory Parish and Our Lady of Fatima.

### My early family years

Sister Guadalupe Moreno Castilleja was born in the city of Tampico Tamaulipas México. She is the oldest of eight kids and comes from a very Catholic family. She shared with us that from her mother’s side there were various family members who belong to a religious community or are priests. It was so much the enthusiasm to practice the faith that she shares: “in my house we would pray the rosary daily with my mom. I also remember that when I was between 8 and 10 years old, I would enjoy praying the rosary at the cathedral with my grandma. I think I was a weird girl, because at that age I would enjoy and be fascinated by the pontifical Mass. I remember that on December 8 when we celebrated the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Tampico’s patron saint, that Mass lasted up to two hours and a half, and I really felt that it was too short of a time.”

## **How my vocation started**

I used to participate in retreats since I was 12 or 13 years old, and I would help the Dominican Sisters that lived close to my house with catechesis. I remember that we would go out to the fields close by to teach catechesis. This faith experience caused that at only 15 years old I had the interest to go into the convent, so I expressed this interest to the Dominican sister since it seemed like a great experience and very beautiful to be a missionary. When a Dominican sister went to the house to ask my parents, the only question my dad asked was, what do you live off of? And the sister told him “We are a medicant order and we ask for alms.” To that my dad answered: “No, my daughter will never go anywhere where they need to ask for alms. Besides she is too young; she is barely 15 years old”. Time passed and when I was 17 the desire to go into a convent was still present, and one of the sisters from the Incarnate Word, where my sisters and I were educated, made invited me to join them. My answer was “Yes” and once again my father received another sister. My father’s question was the same one: “and what do you all live on?” and the sister proudly answered: “we have schools and hospitals; we live off of our work.” Then my dad answered: “She can go. I want my daughter to consecrate her life to God, but I don’t want to see her asking for alms.” And at that moment I entered as candidate at only 17 years old with the sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word in the city of México.

## **My pastoral work in the Diocese of Grand Rapids**

It all began when I was working in the city of México in the National Office of Education of México for Catholic schools and a sister from San Antonio, Texas, told me that a priest, Father Theodore Kozlowski, had invited her and two other people to work with the migrant community during the summer. I was available during the summer since I was on vacation. Then, the sister told me: “Lets go. They will pay for our travel, food and our stay, they won’t give you money, but we don’t need that.” I came for a summer with another sister, I enjoyed working with the migrants, but she didn’t enjoy it as much. She said it was not for her. I came back the following year for another experience with the migrant community. Well, for me the migrants have been an inspiration. While being here Father Ted asked me, why didn’t I just stay the whole year? Obviously my area was education, so I started to form and organize the catechism because they would offer catechesis in the fields during that time and the catechist would do what they could. However, given my educational experience, I came to give the formation more of a structure and give them a place in a parish, a school of catechesis for migrants and Father Ted liked that and so he invited me for a year and after that I stayed for another and another and another, until now.

## **My congregation (Our Charisma)**

The Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word were founded by Msgr. Claudio Maria Dubuis in 1869 and our charisma is to live the Incarnation wherever you are. It’s the Word that incarnates to give life and propels the desire that Jesus himself has placed in each one of

us, it's to live his merciful love and make it known through our ministry. Our founder tells us: "Our Lord Jesus Christ suffering in a multitude of sick and helpless of all types waits for the relief from your hands." In my case I serve the Hispanic immigrant and migrants of the Diocese of Grand Rapids.

### **Words of gratitude**

There are many things that I have to thank the Lord for, but I will only mention a few: Being born into a Catholic family with very strong Christian values; the call to belong to my religious congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word which has helped me grow, mature and make this call come to life, which I consider a privilege; having had the opportunity to be part of the pastoral work of the Diocese of Grand Rapids with its inclusive pastoral vision and always attentive response to the needs of the Hispanic community, and of which I have been a collaborator as a pastoral agent for more than four decades in its Church Mission in West Michigan.