



## MY BACKGROUND

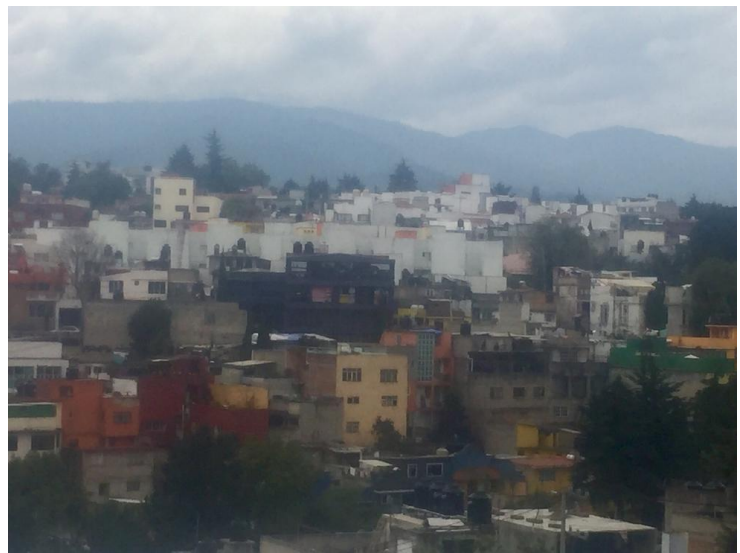
My name is Kathryn Ophardt. I am going into my second year at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary to pursue a Master of Divinity. I graduated from Wittenberg University with a degree in Spanish and Sociology. Then, I did a year of service through the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America as a Young Adult 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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## CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM AT CASA REFUGIADOS



This is the view of my neighborhood from a bridge I cross on my way home.

## DEAR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS,

Thank you so much for your ongoing support and accompaniment this summer. Thank you for your prayer, for your thoughts, and for your compassion for our global neighbors. Your solidarity with us this summer has meant so much to me, to Casa Refugiados, and to those who seek refuge in Mexico City.

It is hard to believe that it is already mid-August. Much is the same and yet much has changed in the three months that I have served here. Mexico City remains largely in a state of quarantine in attempts to prevent the spread of COVID 19. The entirety of Refuge of the Heart has been offered virtually, and that will not likely change any time soon. Casa Refugiados continues to serve and find creative solutions for our neighbors seeking asylum in Mexico City. Yet, in midst of the continued uncertainty, the ongoing pain, and the persistent creativity and compassion, Refuge of the Heart is taking on a new form and so is my concept of ministry.

In my last newsletter, I confessed the flaw of my initial conception of Refuge of the Heart as a pilot program. Expecting to have to prove the “success” of Refuge of the Heart with numbers and demographic statistics, I am shocked and humbled that Casa Refugiados wants to continue Refuge of the Heart despite the fact that I am only aware of having had contact with about 20 people.



## 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 who are seeking asylum, that they stay healthy, find shelter, and feel welcome.

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 persevere and continue to quarantine during the pandemic.

Please pray for health, recovery, and wholeness.

Please pray for Casa Refugiados and the future of Refuge of the Heart as we look for new leadership for the program.



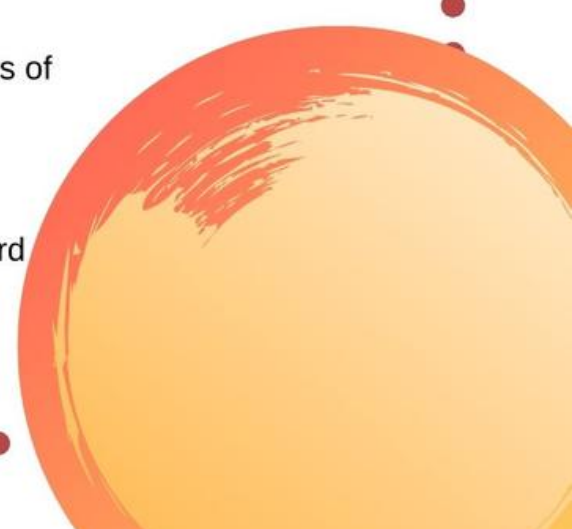

Refuge of the Heart is no longer a pilot program, and likely, it never was. Refuge of the Heart is the culmination of a call that I felt while I was serving as a volunteer during the migrant caravans. It is my response to the burnout and existential nature of refugee resettlement work. It is an invitation for people to listen to themselves, to nature, and to God during their day. But more than anything, it is a seed that the Sower sowed in this office in Mexico City full of rocks and weeds, and so much good soil. And it is a seed that Casa Refugiados has decided to nurture and grow in their organization (Parable of the Sower – Matthew 13).

In these past three months, I have developed 50 meditations that call on interfaith voices to contemplate and better understand the mystery of hope, peace, love, joy, and wellness. I have compiled an interfaith list of online resources for people of faith and people curious about faith. I have created a directory of more than 60 faith communities in Mexico City. I have repeatedly met with two people seeking refuge in Mexico City to give individual spiritual accompaniment, and have meditated often with 15-20 members of the Casa Refugiados team. Yet, I have learned that the seed the Sower has also planted in Refuge of the Heart is growing within more people that I could have imagined after hearing people say that they have used the meditations online and shared them with family members. It is easy to feel like my ministry has touched relatively few people this summer, but when I think about Refuge of the Heart not as my ministry to God's people, but another one of God's ministries to God's people, I am filled with humility and peace. I am learning to listen better to my Minister.

Though seemingly few people have participated in Refuge of the Heart, the founder of Casa Refugiados feels strongly about continuing its ministry. We have been looking for someone to take my place in guiding meditations and offering spiritual accompaniment, but this is complicated by the pandemic. While we continue to look, I have agreed to continue offering spiritual accompaniment in the form of a meditation group that will welcome both asylum seekers and the team who serve them at Casa Refugiados, hopefully offering a small refuge for all of them.

There is so much more to say—more to say about interfaith ministry, more to say about the solidarity of contemplative prayer and meditation, more to say about Kingdom building and neighborliness. If you want to hear more about any of these things, please reach out to me and I would love to talk. Yet, the message I want to leave you with is that while ministry looks different in different contexts, this summer I realized that that being called to serve/minister/accompany a community is about learning how to be a gardener—a steward in the Sower's fields. I pray that the Sower teaches you how to steward the fields in your context too.

Love and peace,  
Kathryn Ophardt



# Refuge of the Heart

## We Walk Toward Wellness Despite Unwellness

### Exploring Natural Solidarity - A Meditation

The more I learn about nature, the more I am surprised by the complexity and the solidarity of its ecosystems. In a balanced habitat, all parts work together for the wellbeing of the ecosystem. One example of this are the trees of a forest. Trees of the same species can join at the roots to share water and nutrients with weaker trees so that they can grow strong together. This is an act of solidarity. They demonstrate that when resources are shared, it strengthens everyone. When trees join at the root and the wellbeing of one tree becomes the responsibility of the other, the result is a stronger forest. In the same way, when human beings care for one another, they create a stronger community. Solidarity is part of nature, and I believe that it is part of our nature as well.

#### The Meditation:

To begin the meditation, I invite you to find a comfortable position. Be conscious of your posture. Breathe in, remembering that you are part of the environment that gives you breath. Breathe out, remembering that the air you release becomes the breath of the plants and the trees around you.

- I invite you to meditate on the example of the trees sharing water and nutrients by connecting at the roots beneath the earth's surface. How does this example from nature connect to your life? How does it connect to the context of the pandemic?
- With whom can you share resources—whether the resources are physical, emotional, spiritual, etc.?
- Who supports you with the resources that you need?
- What does it mean to think about wellness through the lens of solidarity?
- What kind of community do you want to nurture?

To close this time of meditation, I hope that on your path toward wellness, that you would care for others and that others would care for you, finding a new sense of solidarity with all of creation. I hope you are well.