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Nun Serves Migrants Killed at Border only Days After Being Lauded by Pope in Rome

TEXAS — On April 26th, Sr. Norma Pimentel, CEO of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, was honored by Pope Francis at the Vatican as she joined a delegation of [Catholic Extension](https://www.catholicextension.org), a U.S.-pontifical organization, to highlight the role of women in the Church.

The Holy Father praised her “for her service to the many men, women, and children arriving at the southern border of the United States in search of a better future.” Then as an aside, he acknowledged that the situation at the U.S.–Mexico border was grave, describing it in Spanish as “caliente, caliente” (hot, hot).

Only 10 days after the encounter with the Pope, Sr. Norma was back at the border, this time in response to an unprecedented tragedy. On Sunday, May 7th, Sr. Norma was serving the migrants who were injured and killed in front of the Bishop Enrique San Pedro Ozanam Center homeless shelter in Brownsville Texas, as a driver plowed into a crowd of migrants—a case still under investigation. The deceased migrants had survived an arduous journey north only to meet a violent end so close to the new life they dreamed about.

“Sister Norma went from the proverbial mountain top to the valley of the shadow of death in an instant, but this is what Sister Norma does as one of the major moral and prophetic voices of our times in American Catholicism,” said Fr. Jack Wall, president of Catholic Extension. “Like Pope Francis, she believes that the Church should stand with the most vulnerable, with the poorest of the poor. Her place, the church’s place, she believes, is with those on the peripheries offering hope to those who suffer.”

“Presence is what matters,” Sister Norma said at the Vatican on April 27th after receiving Catholic Extension’s Spirit of Francis Award for her service to the poor. “The most important thing is being present, whether they’re crying or suffering. We are there sharing with them a loving embrace to help them feel the loving presence of God who gives them hope. Through

our smiles we actually give them the chance to restore their dignity.” She was putting these words into action only days later.

Sister Norma is a voice in the Church that we need in this perilous and divided time. She believes that the simple, yet profound humanitarian act of giving protection and aid to helpless people like migrants shows us where we can find the face of God in our midst which in turn, deepens the sense of our common humanity.

Sister Norma walks the talk. Over the years, she has provided hope to hundreds of thousands at the U.S.-Mexico border. And hope is not just kind words. It is a shower, new clothes, food, a place to rest, and connections with sponsoring families and relatives in the United States—all services she has provided migrants over the years.

Sister believes we must bring awareness and pray for all who are forced to leave their homes, many of whom are victims of human trafficking, violence and hunger.

She said, “Their voice, their presence, bringing that forward and having the world listen to them is very important. And I think it is who we are as Church. It is important that through our voice, we help those that don’t have a voice.”

The work is far from over. Sr. Norma and the Brownsville community will bury the 8 Venezuelan immigrants killed and the 3 seriously hurt. She will also help lead the efforts to care for and counsel all those who have been emotionally and spiritually devastated by this horrible tragedy. Layer on top of this, the policy changes at the border which occurred last week (the repeal of Title 42), and the new humanitarian needs that are resulting from this.

Sr. Norma shows us that the sacred is not the exclusive domain of the halls of the Vatican but can also be found on the streets of Brownsville, which is made visible to us through empathy and openness of heart.

Catholic Extension supports the work of the Catholic Church along the U.S.–Mexico border, including Sr. Norma’s ministries. If you would like to help, contact catholicextension.org.

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About Catholic Extension: Founded in 1905, Catholic Extension works in solidarity with people to build up vibrant and transformative Catholic faith communities among the poor and in America’s poorest regions. For more information visit www.catholicextension.org; follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/catholicextension or on Twitter at [@CathExtension](https://twitter.com/CathExtension).