



What “baggage” do participants bring when they arrive at BHH?



Diana and her two-year-old daughter arrived with one small handbag that held diapers and a bottle when they left on the 24-hour bus trip from Texas. By the time they arrived in Chicago, only the (empty) bottle remained. They didn't even have a change of clothes.

Andrea, Clara, Jacinta and Kamila arrived on their 18th birthdays with only a small duffel-like bag holding an extra t-shirt and sweatpants, the “uniform” from the ORR “shelters” where child immigrants are held. They were wearing their only shoes—croc-like resin slip-ons.

Trinidad and Wanda came to Bethany House from the MPP (*Remain in Mexico*) program, arriving directly from a shelter on the Texas border. They each had a small suitcase or bag with the clothes they brought with them or received at the shelter. But they also came with less visible baggage.

Trinidad arrived with a \$5000 debt for ransom her family had to pay when she was kidnapped during her almost-two-year stay in the *Remain in Mexico* program. She and her younger sister fled Guatemala together. Trinidad had worked to earn money to start the trip north. They stopped in southern Mexico for a few months where Trinidad worked to earn enough to continue their journey, arriving at the U.S. border after six months, debt-free despite the payments to “coyotes” along the way. At the border, her 14-year-old sister was allowed into the U.S. as an “unaccompanied” child, while Trinidad was placed in the MPP (“Remain in Mexico”) program, where she waited for two long years before being allowed to pursue her asylum claim. During those two years, she was kidnapped *twice* by cartels that demand ransom from families. (Cartel members wait outside the camps and shelters and kidnap persons when they go out to the market for food. Or sometimes they order everyone off a bus, demand proof of their nationality, and “select” those from countries they believe will be most likely to pay ransom.)

Trinidad's family had to borrow \$5000 to pay the ransom for her to be freed rather than killed and left in the desert. They got the money through a family in their town that offers such “migration loans” at significant interest. The expectation and hope was that Trinidad would be able to work and send money home to pay off the loan. (She tried to work while she was still in Mexico, which led to being kidnapped the second time.)

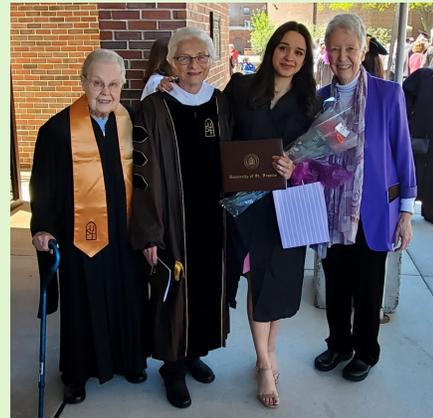
While Trinidad is very willing to work now, her options are limited since she has a child and her work authorization has still not been

approved. Now the loan is due and her family is being threatened because they are unable to pay. The average monthly salary in Guatemala for 2021 was \$554, so the ransom fee is almost a year's income for the family (who is from a small rural area where their income is significantly below the national average).

Might you be able to help Trinidad and her family pay off the debt for the ransom money? Inescapable debt is just one symptom of the systemic poverty that forces many young people to migrate in search of a life of safety and human dignity. Helping with the payment of debts is not something Bethany House has usually provided, but this is an unusual situation that calls for a compassionate response to an urgent need.

Congratulations to Paula!

Paula García Rodríguez graduated this month with her Bachelor's degree in Communications and Marketing from St. Francis University in Joliet. She is pictured here with Sister Rose Marie Surwilo OSF and Sister Dolores Zemont OSF of the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate (who founded St. Francis University), and Sister Patricia Crowley OSB, president of the board of Bethany House.



Our special urgent need this month is to help pay the debt for Trinidad's ransom. Also, when new women arrive, we do have donated clothing to share, but we also try to take each woman shopping for some basics including new underwear, clothing and a pair of shoes. It's amazing how the "small" act of choosing a new outfit or new shoes begins to restore a sense of dignity lost along a very difficult journey.

Donations for everyday needs food, personal items and household needs; transportation to and from school and work; and cell phones for safety and to maintain connections to family are always much needed and very much appreciated.

Monetary donations can be mailed to:

Bethany House of Hospitality
c/o Patricia Crowley OSB
7430 N. Ridge Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60645

Online donations can be made through PayPal:

[Donate to Bethany House](#)

Gift Cards

Gift cards are always welcome for groceries or the women's personal needs. We frequently shop at Local Market Foods, Costco and Jewel. The women appreciate the opportunity for

personalized selection at Ross, Amazon or Target.

Bethany House Of Hospitality

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