

STORIES OF FAITH

“WHATSOEVER YOU DO...”

Just minutes away from the prosperous California coast, Salinas Valley is a whole different landscape.

OUR LADY OF
THE ASSUMPTION
CHURCH
Watsonville, CA
Diocese of Monterey



Nicknamed “America’s Salad Bowl,” the fertile soil of this famous valley produces bountiful harvests of lettuce, spinach, strawberries and more, all destined for dinner tables across the nation.

Imagine the disparity then, of the field hands who work these vast agricultural tracts. Despite the abundance of food surrounding them, they have barely enough to eat. Most have emigrated from Mexico and make less than \$10,000 per year, which they often send to needy relatives back home. It is against this backdrop in the land of plenty that Sister Sandra Ann Silva, SHF, pastoral coordinator of Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Watsonville, California, has dedicated the latest chapter in her life’s work.

Sr. Sandra’s ministry is an oasis to the hundreds of people she serves. In addition to rampant poverty, illiteracy, a lack of health insurance and substandard housing, these immigrants, who are from Oaxaca, Mexico, struggle with greater disadvantages than fellow migrants. This is due in large part to their ability to speak only their indigenous language and discrimination by both Mexicans and Americans. Sister works as their advocate, teacher, community leader and spiritual companion.

The people Sr. Sandra visits often live with four or five families in a single dilapidated house or in garages or

trailers with no plumbing. Although many were baptized Catholic, they have had virtually no faith formation. “So I go knocking on doors,” said Sr. Sandra. On her home visits, she brings beans, rice, toothbrushes and blankets, along with a Bible and some basic catechism for the children. “For many of them, it’s the first time they’ve touched a Bible,” she said. “But little by little, I’m building their trust.”

Last year, Catholic Extension provided a grant of \$35,000 to pay Sr. Sandra’s salary and program expenses. “Without the grant from Catholic Extension, I wouldn’t be able to work with those who are the most neglected and the most preyed upon,” she said. “I’m so grateful that I am able to show them that the church cares.”

Sr. Sandra also is building the faith one family at a time. She provides Bible classes and religious education for children, teens, young adults and adults. She trains catechists to help prepare children and adults to receive the sacraments. What’s more, she’s advocating to make their lives better within the legal, health care and social services arenas. She even hosts weekly sewing classes to offer an opportunity for women to find support and friendship.

Because of Sr. Sandra’s ministry, an often forgotten group of people is being made to feel welcome in the Diocese of Monterey and, more importantly, in the church. ●

Sister Sandra has a small group of loyal volunteers from Compañeros de la Sagrada Familia who help her minister to families.



“Little by little, I’m building their trust.”

— SISTER SANDRA ANN SILVA, SHF