

# *The* GATHERING

*"Do not be afraid, for I am with you, I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west"*

—Isaiah 43:5-7

## Thistle House



One year ago, our church and wider community opened the doors of a house for asylum-seekers: Casa Cardo – “Thistle House.” Thistles grow in difficult soil. They bloom with lovely purple flowers and hold medicinal properties. The single mothers and their children who live in the five apartments of this house have each, like the thistle, survived the harsh soil of traumatic events and migration dangers. Like the purple thistle flowers, these women bloom with beauty, humor, and strength of character. And, like the thistle, they offer restorative medicine as they share their wisdom from their life stories.

We gather with laughter and joy in this community for birthdays and celebrations. We gather praying for hope and safety, showing up for high stakes asylum court hearings and appointments with ICE. We gather in commitment feeling many emotions to try to work out with God’s help the knots

Image of thistle  
from Scotland trip  
taken by Tina  
Schlabach

of conflicts that sometimes rise among us. We gather recognizing the burdens of the sadnesses, trauma and stress we live with, in the different levels of risk and kinds of wounds that we carry.

We are able to gather because we belong to a Restoring God whose love gathers us, just as the Holy One promised to gather family members so long ago from exile. We gather because Jesus first came to Mary, a teenage girl who was socially, economically, and legally vulnerable. We gather because the Spirit of Love speaks, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”

## Questions

During this Advent, how can we slow down to take time to be present with those who may be grieving, including ourselves? When relationships feel thorny, how might we find gentle ways to listen? What has caused this person – or me – to move into the fight response, or perhaps the flight response, brought on by unhealed trauma? How might God’s Spirit bring further healing, through coming together in respect and gentleness?

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