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Sr. Monica Darrichon, SSps

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It was early June when Carolina, the mother of a terminally ill young lady named Sarita, at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital called me. I had been in touch with both of them since 2019, but due to the pandemic, my last visit to the hospital was in March of 2020.

This time it was different! Sarita would not make it since she no longer was responding to the treatment. Her father and older sister wanted to stay with her during her last weeks or days.

Even though Chile was at the pandemic's height, they could receive a permit to travel to the USA. However, they needed a place to quarantine and stay because the hospitality facilities of St. Jude Hospital were closed due to the pandemic. Carolina asked me for a favor, to help find a "posada" for them. After a few days of searching the possibilities and realizing the struggles to find a place, I thought about the possibility to open our convent to them. Although the prospect of living with two absolute strangers who might bring the virus with them was challenging for me, I saw the need to do just that! I found encouragement from the Leadership Team to open our house to them.

The two arrived on July 8th. At the beginning, we saw little of each other. After testing negatively, they were allowed to stay at the hospital during the

day. They were supporting each other while the health of Sarita was declining rapidly.

Sometimes, we ran into each other. They were the nicest people! When they bought food, they always included Sr. Lidia, who was also visiting, and me. They freely shared about themselves and their pain of losing a daughter and a sister. Their presence was a real blessing to me during the pandemic. I was unable to minister to the patients and their families at St. Jude, but God arranged that I had a family under my roof in need of support. We ate, conversed, prayed together, and motivated one another in order to ease the suffering of Sarita, even when it meant a painful loss to each of us.

On August 6, 2020, the feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, Sarita breathed her last surrounded by her mother, father, and sister. We and a few staff from St. Jude were present at the memorial Mass for Sarita. Then came long weeks of bureaucratic procedures before they could take all the documentations and return with the ashes to Chile to bury their child.

When I reflect on this experience in the context of Christmas, it indeed seems that Mary and Joseph passed by, knocking at the door, asking for a place in the inn - posadas. It is God's grace that 'shelters us at home' in such moments and allows us to open the door at the sound of knocking. It is a blessing that the knock is heard in spite of the noise of fear, frustration, precaution and anxiety. It is God's incredible work that beckons us to respond to the needs of others, to continue the 'mission' despite the pandemic.

Baby Jesus, as I place you in the crib of the little crèche in the convent, I ask your blessing for this family who found a home here this summer. With them, I believe that you welcomed Sarita into your Father's house.

