

JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS

A Call from the Immigration Core Committee of the Atlantic-Midwest and Central Pacific Provinces

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Experience

Desiring to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters at the US/Mexican border, SSNDs came to form a community in Douglas, AZ in August, 2010. Knowing that love cannot wait, we opened our hearts, encountered hope and desperation in the eyes of many migrants, listened, and learned. In less than four years, the Migrant Resource Center, where we volunteer, has served over 15,750 men, women and youth on their migratory path. Over and over, we hear the same stories ... "I came to bury my father after being in the US for 7, 12 or 20 years; I need to get back to my wife and children in the states; I want to work and provide for my family; my children need education; my wife is sick." We collaborate with a variety of individuals and humanitarian aid groups, walk desert trails searching for vulnerable migrants and help fill water tanks or leave gallons of water and bags of emergency food in strategic spots on the migrant trails of Arizona's deadly and unforgiving desert.

Educated in the states, Victor went back to Mexico with his parents four years ago. He wanted to visit his little brother in Nevada who was turning 12. We met Victor at the Migrant Resource Center in November 2013. [Click here](#) to meet him and hear a brief account. Countless men and women, sometimes with children on both sides of the border, struggle to maintain family unity within the constraints of our broken immigration system. It is reported that there are an

estimated 5000 children of deported parents in foster care in the U.S.

Maria Trinidad smiled through her tears as she shared her story of walking five days through the Peloncillo Mountains of New Mexico before awaking to the flashlight of the Border Patrol in her eyes. Having endured the abuse of Mexican bandits and the empty promises of crossing guides south of the border, she recounted the verbal abuse and harassment she experienced while in U.S. detention. Legal entry into the U.S. is difficult to attain; it is desperation for work, the desire to be with family and the promises of those who sell "easy and secure passage across the border wall" that bring people to willingly risk multiple dangers.

None of the residents of Douglas along with participants in border immersion groups know Guadalupe Ramirez Mejia, but continuing to witness to the tragedy of migrant deaths in the desert, they have gathered every Tuesday since December 2000 to remember her and place a cross with her name on the curb of the street leading to the border. ([Click here for the story of Two Backpacks.](#)) The number of crosses in this Healing the Border vigil has now grown to 264—representing persons found in the desert of Cochise County only, while nearly 3,000 bodies have been recovered along the entire southern Arizona border.

Analysis

Analysis The human stories of those persons who cross borders seeking a better life for themselves and their families are recognizable to most of us. These contemporary stories of crossings, filled with risk-taking and loss, echo the stories of our ancestors who also crossed waters and national boundaries while carrying the weighty grief of farewells spoken to those they most loved in the world. As we in the United States debate and discern an immigration reform policy for the 21st century, it is critical that we do not forget the stories of immigrants then and now who have risked much to make this land their own.

For many of the 11 million undocumented persons living in the United States, immigration is a matter of life or death. The “push” factors behind the difficult decision to leave one’s country include: poverty, high unemployment, political instability, war, discrimination, persecution, drought, famine, and natural disasters. Many of the social and political challenges in countries of origin are related to economic policies, trade agreements, and demand for illicit drugs which originate in the wider global community. Among the “pull” factors which motivate immigrants to risk death or arrest on their journey to the U.S. are opportunity for employment, safety, and the hope of family reunification. Many myths about immigrants exist and they impact the current debate in the United States about immigration. To read about the myths and the facts about immigration [click here](#).

According to the Migration Policy Institute of the United States, border enforcement costs \$18 billion a year, more than all other federal criminal-law-enforcement agencies combined. Regardless of the cost of fences, border patrols, and use of drones, 1.95 million people have been deported during the administration of president Obama alone. Over 5,000 children of deported parents have been placed in the U.S. foster care program. [Click here](#) to put U.S. immigration enforcement policies into perspective.

The United States has not successfully addressed immigration reform for a number of years. However, the current crisis of 11 million persons living in the shadows of our land combined with strong and persistent advocacy from a diverse coalition of faith and non-faith based groups is placing significant pressure on Congress to act. In June 2013, The U.S. Senate, with strong bi-partisan agreement, passed S. 744, the *Border Security, Economic Competitiveness, and Immigration Innovation Act of 2013*. Four components of the Senate bill address several of the concerns held by those on both sides of the immigration debate. These include an increase in U.S./Mexico border security, an achievable path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants residing in the country before Dec. 31, 2011, family reunification and a generous DREAM Act. [Click here](#) for a more thorough discussion of the provisions in S. 744. To date, the House of Representatives has not voted on S. 744. Instead, the House has issued a *Statement of Principles* which they propose as a guide to any future discussions on immigration reform policy. These principles include: making border security and enforcement a priority before addressing immigration reform legislation, a biometric system to locate those who have broken U.S. immigration laws, increased employment verification systems, a de-emphasis of the family based reunification system, a stress on temporary work visas, a provision for a path to citizenship for youth brought to the U.S. as children, a provisional status for immigrants who pass a series of screens and pay fines, but no path to citizenship for the 11 million persons who have entered the U.S. illegally.

The impasse around Comprehensive Immigration Reform for the United States that many in Congress experience is not just another example of Washington gridlock. It is matter of life and death for human beings who risk the [perilous trip](#) at the border and a less than dignified life in the shadows of our economy and society.



Reflection

The Catholic Church, along with many other faith and non-faith based groups, has been unwavering in advocating for justice for immigrants. Tapping the deep roots of our tradition in which justice, hospitality, and mercy toward the stranger is a practice of faith, the Catholic Church has articulated several principles to guide the shaping of an immigration law which is ethical and just. Among these principles are:

- People have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
- People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.
- The human dignity and rights of undocumented migrants should be upheld.
- Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.
- The root causes of migration – poverty, injustice, religious intolerance, armed conflict must be addressed so that migrants can remain in their homeland.
- A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration in ways that are merciful and just.

For a more comprehensive presentation on Catholic Social Teaching and Immigration, [click here](#) and [click here](#).

For further reflection and conversation:

- How does an immigrant's story intersect with your own story? What insights does this give you about the current debate on Immigration in the U.S. today?
- How do you think about, or feel about, the principles which guide the Catholic Church's perspectives on Immigration?
- How do these words from the SSND Directional Statement, "to intensify our efforts to witness to unity in a divided world by holding all in common" shape and inform your commitment to justice for immigrants?
- What do you perceive as the challenges as well as the opportunities of comprehensive immigration reform policy for the United States?

Action

There are many ways to be in solidarity with immigrants and the larger movement which is promoting justice for immigrants in the United States. Here are a few suggestions:

Pray: Maintain a daily practice of mindfulness of migrants and immigrants who yearn for a dignified life for themselves and their families.

Learn/Educate: Continue to update yourself and others regarding the myths and facts of immigration reform, the Church's social teaching and the developments in immigration policies being proposed by Congress. For educational resources and updates [click here](#).

Act: Contact your legislators on a regular basis and express your opinion that just and merciful comprehensive immigration reform legislation for the United States must contain the following

- Provide a path to citizenship for undocumented persons in the country
- Preserves family unity as a corner-stone of our national immigration system
- Provides legal paths for low-skilled immigrant workers to come and work in the United States
- Restores due process protections to our immigration enforcement policies
- Addresses the root causes (push factors) of migration, such as persecution and economic disparity.

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To contact your legislators [click here](#).

Reach Out: Are there immigrants in your neighborhood or parish community? Plan to participate in events where you have opportunities to meet and get to know immigrants.

Resources

Web Addresses for Mentioned Resources

Victor's story: www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUERGjy2DZk&feature=youtu.be.

Story of the Two Backpacks: www.ssnd.org/sites/default/files/files/Shalom/two_backpacks.pdf

Myths and Facts About Immigration: www.justiceforimmigrants.org/myths.shtml

U.S. Immigration Enforcement Policies: www.immigrantjustice.org/staff/blog/what-does-19-million-deportations-look#.U2zdEq0nKM9

Immigration Reform Bill FAQs: www.nilc.org/irsenateS744faq.html

Perilous Trip Maps and Posters: www.humaneborders.org/warning-posters/

Catholic Social Teaching and Immigration: www.slideshare.net/carlchudy/immigration-and-catholic-social-teaching

and: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/catholic-teaching-on-immigration-and-the-movement-of-peoples.cfm

Educational Resources and Updates: www.justiceforimmigrants.org/index.shtml

To Contact Your Legislators: www.capwiz.com/justiceforimmigrants/issues/alert/?alertid=62312721&type=CO