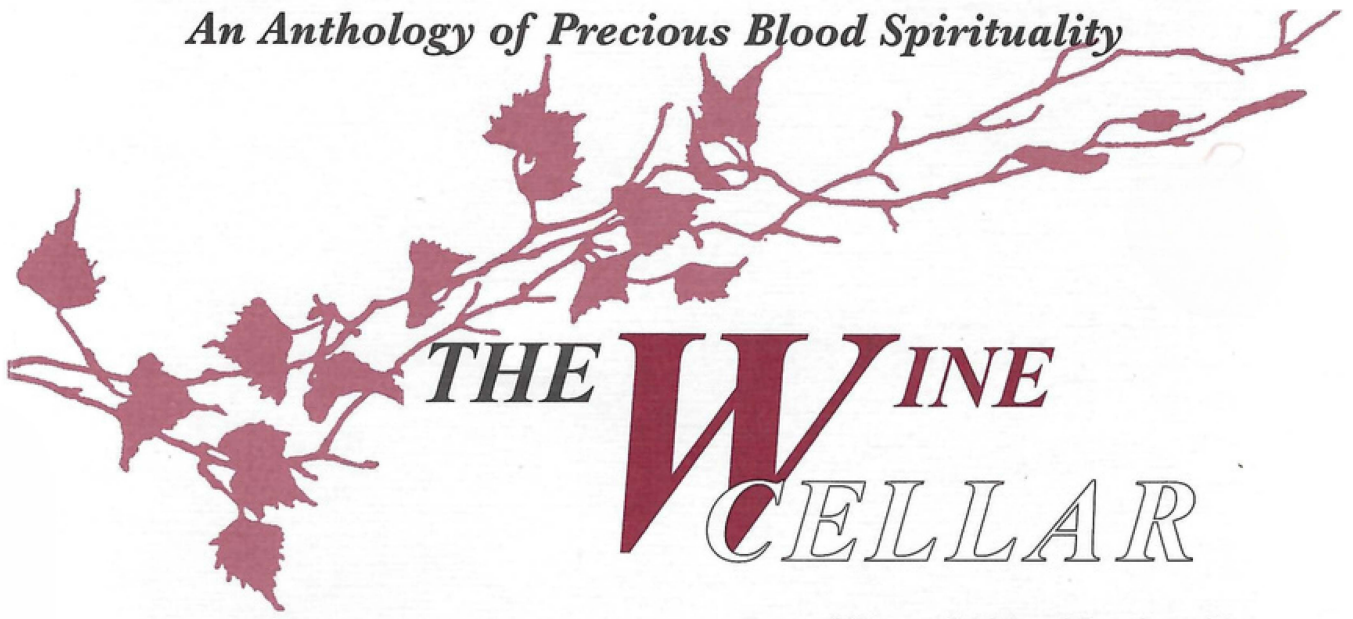
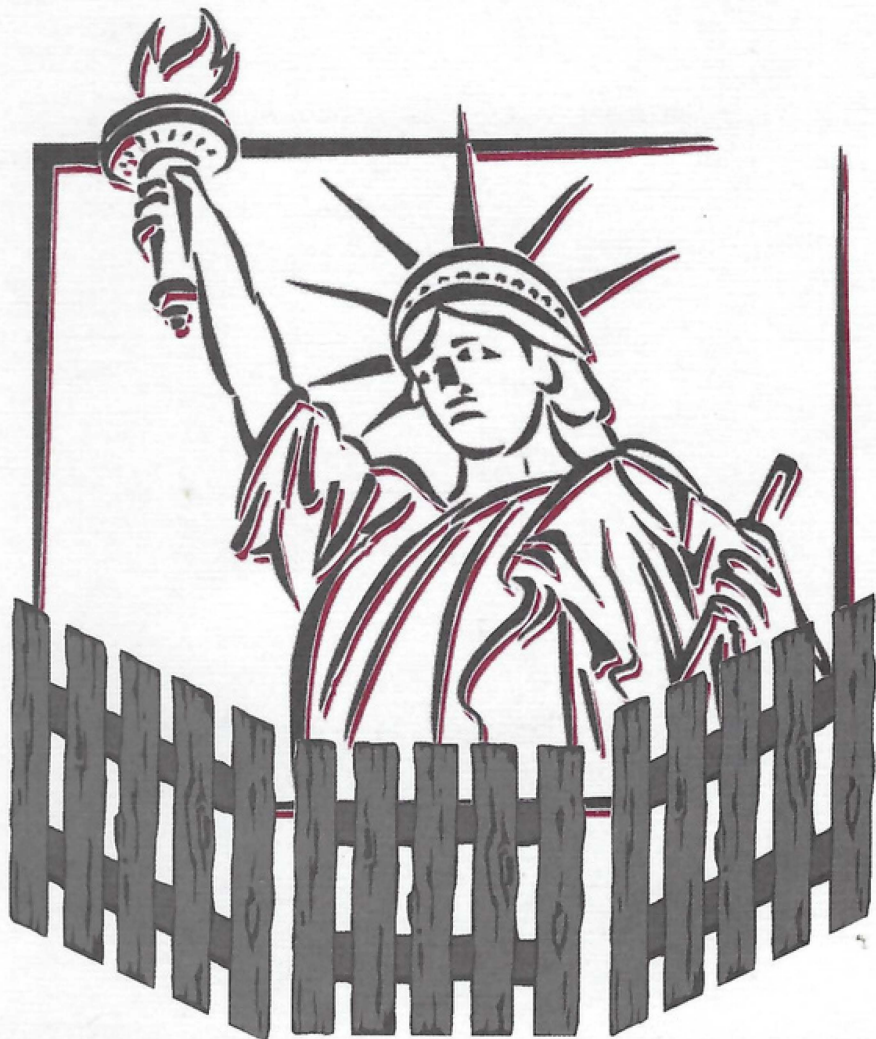


An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality



THE *W* **INE**
CELLAR

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IMMIGRATION

*The heart of Jesus
is the wine cellar
of the Blood of Christ*

Gaspar del Bufalo

*The
Wine Cellar*

An Anthology of Precious Blood Spirituality

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Table of Contents

From the Wine Cellar: Like A Good Neighbor Joseph Nassal, C.PP.S.	<u>4</u>
The Human Face of Immigration Mark Miller, C.PP.S. and Joe Uecker, C.PP.S.	<u>9</u>
Conversion, Communion & Solidarity Lucy Meissen, C.PP.S.	<u>16</u>
Is There A Stranger Among Us? Dien Truong, C.PP.S.	<u>26</u>
Welcoming Christ Among Us Al Ebach, C.PP.S.	<u>33</u>
Continuing the Story Mary Schoenecker, ASC	<u>39</u>
Strangers No More Eileen Schieber, C.PP.S.	<u>40</u>
Words for It Julia Cameron	<u>47</u>

From the
Wine Cellar



By Joseph Nassal, CPPS

Like a Good Neighbor

"Here is not merely a nation, but a teeming nation of nations."

Walt Whitman

How did you celebrate "National Good Neighbor Day?" Did you know there was such a day? It is celebrated every year on the fourth Sunday in September. This year it was September 24. Good Neighbor Day began in 1971 when a woman named Becky Mattson in Montana wrote a letter to her Senator, Mike Mansfield. He enthusiastically endorsed the idea and three U.S. Presidents—Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter—all wrote presidential proclamations to rally folks to observe National Good Neighbor Day. I don't know if it is significant, but notice no president since Jimmy Carter has endorsed the notion of setting aside a day to be a good neighbor.

Maybe they've been too busy planning wars and building fences. The Congress commemorated Good Neighbor Day by passing legislation called the "Security Fence Act" that mandates a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexican border. President George Bush signed the bill less than three weeks before the mid-term elections. In a poll taken at about the same time, 53% of the people polled indicated that immigration was one of the top three issues that would influence for whom they would vote.

In the same poll, 68% of those likely to vote said the immigration levels in the United States were too high while only two percent indicated they were too low. It is estimated there are 12 million illegal immigrants living in the United States.

According to the poll, 64% indicated their support for the repatriation (either voluntary or involuntary) of illegal immigrants.

How far we have come from the “Good Neighbor” policy toward Central and Latin American initiated by Franklin Delano Roosevelt when, instead of the military interventions of previous administrations against certain countries in Latin America, Roosevelt tried to enkindle a spirit of solidarity with our neighbors to the south. “In the field of world policy I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor,” Roosevelt said in his first inaugural address on March 4, 1933. “The neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors.”

Jesus was certainly a proponent of such a good neighbor policy. In the famous story from Luke’s gospel about the Good Samaritan (10, 25-37), he spells out for an inquisitive lawyer the definition of a good neighbor: the one who treats the other with mercy and compassion. The power of this familiar parable is found in Jesus advising that we take down the privacy fences around our hearts and reach out to all, even those we find most difficult to love. Jesus is clear: we are responsible for and accountable to one another.

Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan takes us beyond the limits of country, color or creed. In Jesus’ neighborhood, all are welcome and all find a place. Jesus’ definition of neighbor does not depend on cultural background or political ideology or theology or ecclesiology.

But we live in a world where it is “us” against “them.” Certainly in the last five years with the war on terrorism, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the continuing violence in the Middle East, the battle lines seem to be drawn more clearly than ever.

Unfortunately, certain groups, ethnic or otherwise, are lumped into the “them” and so we tend to demonize what we fear. Whether it is the color of their skin, their ethnic origin, the content of their creed, their

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sexual orientation or gender,
their political affiliation or
ideology, people in one camp
may say of another, "He's one
of them."

There is always a "them."
Whenever lines are drawn in
the sand—or around the altar or

at the border in the form of a 700-mile fence—there is division
and not communion. Such a position is contrary to the kingdom of
God. As Thomas Keating writes, "In the kingdom of God,
communion is more important than worship. Worship is hypocrisy
and a pious sham if we have not first passed through the gate of
reconciliation."

This issue of *The Wine Cellar* opens these gates of
reconciliation taking its key from Ephesians 2 where Paul reminds
us, "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been
brought near through the blood of Christ. It is he who is our
peace, and who made the two of us one by breaking down the
barrier of hostility that kept us apart (2, 13-14)." Precious Blood
Fathers Mark Miller and Joe Uecker unlock these gates of
reconciliation by putting a human face on the issue of
immigration. "When our Congress talks about immigration
reform," they write, "immigrants are still primarily seen as 'those
people' who are breaking the laws and taking jobs away from our
own citizens. But all immigrants have names, they have a family
history, they have hopes and dreams like all people; they are
human beings seeking a place to raise a family and improve their
own lives." Inspired by Paul's inclusive vision of the spirituality
of the blood of Christ, Mark and Joe outline several principles
from Catholic Social Teaching that focus our attention on why
this is a moral issue.

Precious Blood Sister Lucy Meissen ministers in the Diocese
of Las Cruces, New Mexico. She traces the immigration issue
from the ancient stories in Scripture to modern statistical data,
identifying three keys to unlock the gates of reconciliation:
conversion, communion, and solidarity. "From the viewpoint of
spirituality," Sister Lucy writes, "we are aware that knowing the
external facts and figures is important but does not change the
system. It is only through a process of entering the inner world

that we will come to that place in our hearts that will make a difference in how we respect one another.”

Drawing upon his own experience as a refugee from Vietnam, Precious Blood Father Dien Truong reflects how the struggles and hardships he endured have shaped his response to this issue of immigration today. “After years of struggle,” he writes, “I realized that my sense of helplessness in this ‘strange land’ only increased if I did not accept others as my friends and adapt a new culture as my own. This is my motivation in serving those who are immigrants today.”

Remembering our own stories is central in understanding the issues surrounding immigration, according to Precious Blood Father Al Ebach who encounters many people in his Ministry on the West Side of Kansas City “who have been working in the United States for a number of years and now face the possibility of deportation.” Al reflects how Catholic Social Teaching informs the current political debate about immigration and challenges all to become engaged in the process reminding how the Church’s tradition call us “to protect the rights of all people.”

Precious Blood Sister Eileen Schieber who works in Hispanic Ministry in Sedalia, Missouri anchors this issue of *The Wine Cellar* reminding us, “Our spirituality is not one of building walls, but of dissolving enmities in the mercy of which we are all benefactors.” Sister Eileen reflects on some of the stories of struggle that visit her on a daily basis in her local community while acknowledging immigration must be addressed as a global reality.

As St. Paul reminds us later in that second chapter of Ephesians, because we are brought near through the blood of Christ, “This means that you are strangers and aliens no longer (Eph. 2, 19).” Embracing this truth, this edition of *The Wine Cellar* seeks to contribute to the dialogue about one of the most pressing human and moral issues of our day. “In our spirituality we are formed and sent forth in the conviction that all are included in the saving power of the Blood of Jesus,” Sister Eileen writes. “We recognize the dear neighbor in each face we meet, the blood brother and sister with whom we share life.”



Then God asked Cain,
"Where is your brother Abel?"
He answered, "I do not know.
Am I my brother's keeper?
Then God said,
"What have you done!
Listen: Your brother's blood
cries out to me from the soil."

Genesis 4, 9-10

The Human Face of Immigration

By
Mark Miller, CPPS
&
Joe Uecker, CPPS

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off
Have become near by the blood of Christ.
For he is our peace,
He who made both one and broke down
the dividing wall of enmity....
Ephesians 2, 13-14*

How does one begin to get a handle on the issue of immigration? Is it a political issue? Is it a moral issue? Is it a human issue? That depends on who is speaking or listening. From our point of view, the answer is *yes* to all the questions. However, if one listens only to the media, one would think it is but one *political* issue among other *political* issues. The moral aspects are seldom seen. The human aspects are swept under the rug. It is difficult for us as a nation to include any kind of ethical and moral perspective regarding our political policies because to some people that would violate the separation of church and state.

However, as people of faith, we are called to use our ethical and moral guidelines to assist us in arriving at solutions for these political issues. In 2000, Pope John Paul II spoke these words on World Migration Day:

The Church hears the suffering cry of all who are uprooted from their own land, of families forcefully separated, of those who, in the rapid changes of our day, are unable to find a stable home anywhere. She senses the anguish of those without rights, without any security, at the mercy of every kind of exploitation, and she supports them in their unhappiness.

How many millions of people that the pope describes are living among us today! Many times they are not *known* to be *illegal* or *undocumented* because, believe it or not, that doesn't show. They look like and act like anyone else around us. They may speak differently, depending on where we are, but they are human beings just like us.

In 2003, The Catholic Bishops of the United States and Mexico issued a pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer*, in which they outlined some of the principles that must be kept in mind in the whole discussion about immigration.

- ***Immigrants to any country are our brothers and sisters.***
This principle is fundamental: we are all members of the one human family, with rights and obligations.

- ***Even in the harsh stories of migration, God is present.***
The biblical tradition offers several stories of God's presence in the midst of migration that serve to instruct us today: Abraham moves in response to God's call; the Israelites leave Egypt under the guidance of God; and the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph move to Egypt at the warning of an angel.

- ***All persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.***
The bishops remind us this includes economic, social and political opportunities enabling all to live a full life through the use of their God-given gifts.

- **All persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.** *All the goods of the earth belong to all people. When people cannot find the means to support their families in their homeland, they have a right to find work elsewhere.*
- **Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.** *This right would cease when such control is merely to acquire additional wealth. The more powerful the nation, the greater the obligation to accommodate migration flows.*
- **Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.** *The global community has an obligation to protect those who flee wars and persecution. Migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims considered by a competent authority.*
- **The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.** *All people possess inherent human dignity that must be respected. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.*

Obstacles Immigrants Face

A local lawyer who works primarily with criminal cases but also helps those seeking citizenship or work permits so as to remain working in the United States told us recently, “Our system is difficult and complicated” and is not family- or people-friendly in its approach. Due to the quota system, those who applied for a visa in 1992 are now the ones being processed. She went on to say that the more common obstacles for immigrants to overcome, especially from Mexico, include stereotyping, racial remarks, and understanding the North American culture. It is easier for immigrants coming to the bigger cities

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rather than rural communities because they can find a greater sense of home due to the number of immigrants present.

Another immigration counselor who works with the Church stated: "The most common obstacle faced by immigrants is the language barrier. Many never attended one day of school in their own country." Couple this with the fear of being discovered and deported, how is a person going to take the necessary classes to become proficient in English? Courses are offered, through churches and Catholic Charities, organizations that do not ask about national origin or legal status, but how does one get to the classes without a license? Any misstep on the street, whether the fault of the immigrant or not, would result in deportation, whether that person has children who are U.S. citizens or not. How does one get a license without a Social Security card? There may be nine little numbers on the Social Security card, but not having

As our fear of terrorism heightens, greater attention is placed upon those areas where terrorist might enter our country. Certainly our borders offer some possibilities. However, there seems to be greater attention given to our southern border than our northern border.

those little numbers is a major obstacle to any kind of a life in the United States.

"We have no program to help the illegal alien," the same counselor said. "An employer can get legal status for the illegal, but why should they if they (the employees) work hard and get paid whatever the employer wishes?"

Work 12-hour days 7 days a week. Can the employee complain to the Labor Workforce? I don't think so; he or she would be on the next bus to their country. We do have a program in which a person does qualify through their education and experiences, but our people are not doctors, engineers, nurses, physical therapists; they come to work on jobs that the U.S. citizen refuses to work."

Facing our Fears

Since September 11, 2001, our nation has lived under the fearful cloud of terrorism and the issue of immigration now falls under this category. As our fear of terrorism heightens, greater attention is placed upon those areas where terrorist might

enter our country. Certainly our borders offer some possibilities. However, there seems to be greater attention given to our southern border than our northern border. Is this decision based on evidence or on some covert form of racism? While we have more people immigrating from the south, there is no evidence that there is a greater chance of terrorism coming from the south than from our northern border.

“We must never forget that many immigrants come to this country in desperate circumstances,” the United States Catholic Bishops wrote in *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* (November 2000). “Some have fled political persecution, war, and economic desperation at home. As Pope John Paul II has noted, ‘In many regions of the world today people live in tragic situations of instability and uncertainty. It does not come as a surprise that in such contexts the poor and the destitute make plans to escape, to seek a new land that can offer them bread, dignity and peace. This is the migration of the desperate....’”

Given the desperation so many in our world feel today, any true “solution” to illegal immigration to the U.S. must take into account the root causes of the poverty from which many immigrants are trying to escape.

How desperate is the situation around the world?

- There are 60 countries in today’s world that are poorer than they were thirty years ago.
- A fifth of the world’s population (1.2 billion people) live on less than \$1 per day and almost half the world’s population, or 2.8 billion people, live on less than \$2 a day.
- A child dies of malnutrition every second. (Is this less of an injustice than abortion?)
- Economic injustice still plagues most of the world, providing a strong impetus for immigrants.

Given the desperation so many in our world feel today, any true "solution" to illegal immigration to the U.S. must take into account the root causes of the poverty from which many immigrants are trying to escape.

When someone is faced with either watching their family starve to death or going to a country where there is a greater possibility of being able to sustain one's family, what choice does this person have? Faced with the reality that it will take more than ten years to get a visa to come "legally," then another path will be chosen. Or, as is the case with some of our parishioners, they have raised a family here, the one parent is a citizen, the children are all citizens, but the other parent isn't. This parent cannot approach the INS for fear of being "deported" and then having to apply for a visa which could take over 10 years to receive. As a parent, which choice would you pursue?

But threats do not come to the undocumented immigrant only from the government. Many undocumented people own homes and cars, but these are in the names of relatives that are here legally. The risk is that, if there is a disagreement, the relative is by law the owner of the property, not the undocumented person. People have been known to turn against their relatives and call the Border Patrol on each other. The undocumented person has no recourse: raise your voice and you get deported.

Immigration: A Moral Issue

We probably don't have to say more to convince people that this is not only a political issue, but a human and moral issue as well. If it is a moral issue, if the laws are unjust, must they be followed? What can be done?

On May 1, 2006 we saw hundreds of thousands of people gather in many cities across the country to protest the present immigration laws. That was one day. Was there any difference on May 2? Did any laws change? More importantly, did any hearts change?

When our Congress talks about immigration reform or when this conversation takes place in coffee houses and bowling alleys around our nation, immigrants are still primarily seen as "those people" who are breaking the laws and taking jobs away from our own citizens. But all immigrants have names, they have a family history, they have hopes and dreams like all people; they are

human beings seeking a place to raise a family and improve their own lives.

The state of Texas has 32% Hispanic population (as of 2000) and yet the two Republican U.S. Senators have voted in favor of "the fence." By the time this article is published, the elections will be over. What that will mean is anyone's guess. But it seems likely that if the control of the Congress remains the same, nothing will change. If one or both houses of Congress change, something might be possible.

For any real change to occur, there must be a change of the heart. With or without documents, immigrants have the same yearnings as U.S. citizens have. They have hopes and dreams; they have families; they have relatives and friends back in their home country and they would love to visit. *Catholic* calls us to openness. *The Blood* calls us to see them as our sisters and brothers. *Justice* calls us to realize that all the goods of the earth belong to all people.



For Reflection

- Are all political issues, moral issues? If so, how does our moral code of conduct impact our behavior and response to the political arena of our nation?
- Do you agree with the 7 principles mentioned in the Bishops Pastoral Letter, *Strangers No Longer*? Do you feel these principles are operative in the present debate on immigration?
- Do you know an "undocumented" person or someone who has a family member who is undocumented? Does personal experience have an impact on how we react to this issue?



Precious Blood Missionaries Joseph Uecker and Mark Miller provide servant leadership for the parishes of St. Joseph and St. Anthony in Odessa, TX. Mark was vice-provincial of the Kansas City Province from 1991-1995 and provincial from 1995-2003. Joe served both the province and the General Council in Rome in leadership. Both have been active leaders in the struggle for justice and peace for many years.



Conversion, Communion & Solidarity

By Lucy Meissen, CPPS

Has anything changed in the last 3500 years?

The Israelites migrated into Egypt, settled, and from a mere seventy-two persons grew into a populous group. Egyptians who did not know Israel's history, began to feel uneasy and suspicious about the foreigners, who tended to keep to themselves with their own customs, religion and ways of doing things. To paraphrase the first chapter of Exodus about the Egyptians' reaction to the presence of the Israelites, "These people have too many babies, they are lazy and if we are not careful they will take over the government (*cf.* Ex. 1, 1-10)."

Has anything changed? Today the government of the United States of America is looking at the ethnicity of our population and realizes that there are millions of people of Hispanic heritage in the country. And what are they implying about "those" people? *They have too many children, they are lazy and if we don't do something soon they may take over the country.* Like the Pharaoh of a former time, our government proposes to set limits and boundaries against the foreigners, to build walls and establish tighter border control. It legalized abortion and pushes contraception education to facilitate the reduction of the birth rate. Some propose the deportation of all the undocumented. Working conditions are harsh, living wages are meager, and separation of families a non-issue.

Migrant or Citizen: Looking at statistics

Not every person from another country is undocumented and illegal. Many families of Mexican heritage have lived in the territory of the United States long before the migration of people from Europe. Others have been citizens of the United States since the Gadsden Purchase in 1854. They speak fluent English and struggle to maintain the Spanish language. They are farmers and professionals in all fields of work, and seek to be integrated into the dominant culture while maintaining their native customs and traditions that preserve their heritage and identity.

There are many guest workers living here, some with their families, others whose families remain in their native country. These workers are engaged in every level of our economy from highly skilled professionals (doctors, professors, economists) to the migrant workers who contribute to the construction, production and processing of the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the cars we drive, and the houses in which we live. While 10,000 guest worker visas are granted to Mexican people every year, it is estimated that over 300,000 Hispanic people come into the United States during that same year. Census data indicates that there are 41.9 millions Hispanics living in this country. The U.S. Bishops estimate there are 65 million Hispanics living within the

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U.S. borders. Panic reports say there are 11.5 to 12 million undocumented Latinos living and working here.

According to 2005 data provided by the Pew Research Center, the median age of Hispanics in the U.S. is 27—considerable lower than 40, the median age for whites. Half of native-born Hispanics are currently 17 years old or younger, half of foreign-born Hispanics are 35 or younger.

The Las Cruces Diocese estimates that 1/3 of its territorial population is Catholic and of those, 65% are of Hispanic descent. Of these about ten percent are monolingual Spanish speaking. At least one Mass is celebrated in Spanish in 95% of our parishes every weekend.

When we realize the number of people coming north from Mexico, Central and South America into the United States, we encounter the question of the migration of peoples. To give guidance concerning this issue the Bishops of Mexico and the United States issued a joint document in January 2003, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*. The Leadership Council of Women Religious (LCWR) summarized the five principles of this document in their July 2006 *Resolution to Action*:

- Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
- Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
- Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.
- Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.
- The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

The New Evangelization: Encountering the Spirit

From the viewpoint of spirituality, we are aware that knowing the external facts and figures is important but does not change the system. We must, unlike the Egyptians in the story of Exodus, know our history. It is only through a process of entering the inner world that we will come to that place in our hearts that will make a difference in how we respect one another. Only when we open ourselves to the power of the Spirit can we find our connectedness with one another, with the triune God and all creation.

At the turn of the century, Pope John Paul II called a special synod for the Americas. He chose to title the summary document *Ecclesia in America*, using a singular noun America, to call our attention to our need for solidarity among the many different

societies that live in this vast land. Here is the call to mission that he names “a new evangelization”:

“The encounter with the living Jesus Christ” is “the path to conversion, communion and solidarity (no. 7).” Such an encounter ... leads to a daily vision of the risen Lord, present and active in the world, especially in the poor, in the stranger, and in the migrant and refugee. These immigrants, new to our shores, call us out of our unawareness to a conversion of mind and heart through which we are able to offer a genuine and suitable welcome, to share together as brothers and sisters at the same table, and to work side by side to improve the quality of life for society’s marginalized members. In so doing, we work to bring all the children of God into a fuller communion, the communion willed by God, begun in time and destined for completion in the fullness of the Kingdom (*Ecclesia in America*, 33).

Conversion: Movement of the Spirit

Thelma Hall, R.C. in her book, *Too Deep for Words*, describes Jesus’ experience of the Spirit at the time of his baptism as a profound conversion. In that moment of vision and revelation, the Spirit, the voice from above, grasped his whole being around and surrounding him as in an embrace saying, “You are my beloved.” Jesus grew up in a loving, hardworking family. He learned the Hebrew Scriptures, he knew the psalms and the prophecies about the messiah, and he was familiar with Isaiah and Jeremiah. In this baptismal moment he has a new realization of the Spirit power of Love, the total acceptance by his Father. Jesus took to the desert to try to make sense of it all. So life changing was this experience and his acceptance of it that his family and friends did not recognize him when he came back to them.

Mother Theresa Weber reminds us, “You are precious.” How profoundly do I allow the Spirit of the living God to grasp my inner spirit? Am I willing to let that Spirit change me as I enter daily the mission of the church? Do I allow desert time in my life for the Spirit to work and make sense of this call of love? As I reflect on the life changing call of the Spirit, I am better able to

embrace the unconditional Love of God for me. I am better able to embrace the preciousness of the people who come into my life.

Our spirituality as people of the Precious Blood is rooted in the Church's liturgical celebration of the Paschal Mystery. What are some of the implications of a liturgical spirituality, for immigration and welcoming the stranger? What do we learn and promise through our celebration of the Eucharist and Sacraments, our daily liturgy of the hours and our devotions to the Blood of Christ?

The first act of liturgy is one of hospitality, welcoming not only those who come to the church but everyone who comes into our lives. In this attitude of worship, we open the doors of our hearts to people of every race, culture and way of life. When we come to the doors of the church, we carry with us the poor, the homeless, the orphan and widow who seek shelter and asylum.

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Through the "Lord, have mercy, *Senor, ten piedad,*" we open ourselves to the gracious mercy of God to transform our self-centered ways of living into self-giving, other-loving community.

The Art of Active Listening

Listening to the word of God, entering into the great story of salvation, we learn how essential it is to listen to the life story of others. Gradually we begin to recognize how all our stories are joined together.

Sister of Mercy Kathleen Erickson founded an intercultural center for women in the border town of Anthony, New Mexico. After ten years she turned the leadership over to the women themselves and took a year sabbatical. Returning to this area she now does spiritual counseling with immigrant women who are being held in detention on the US/Mexican border waiting to be either deported or given papers allowing them to stay in the United States. Recently she wrote of her experience:

Oh, my. So many women who begin the trek north have no idea that if they are caught by border patrol, they will be put in handcuffs and chains, strip-searched and given prison uniforms, and put in a detention center. They are in shock. And sometimes they are the lucky one. They have seen their companions die in the desert, or been kicked and beaten. ... [or enslaved in human trafficking]...

Undocumented detainees not only have the obvious problems with immigration status, they, too, struggle with family problems, loneliness, abandonment and physical illness. As human beings they try to make sense of the desperate situation of their lives. ...Some cannot stop crying.

It is in this tiny room, during these sessions, I realize the importance of the privileged doing everything we can to change the consciousness of this world. By this I mean we must recognize on the external level that the way the world is "put together" by we humans does not work for far too many of us. I also mean that on the spiritual or internal level, we have to plumb the depths of our belief in the unity of all things, the Mystical Body, the oneness of us all. A more contemplative spirit will help us find our oneness and explore what it truly means. We will seek creative ways to break down barriers, remove borders, and live as one. (Kathleen Erickson RSM, October 2006, Agua Viva, a publication of the Diocese of Las Cruces.)

*It is through the art of active listening that Sr. Kathleen is able to be with these women and listen to theirs stories in a stance of what Father Timothy Coday, CPPS describes as walking "Bega Kwa Bega, shoulder to shoulder" with others (*Wine Cellar*, Summer 2006.) In the listening we learn to connect the stories, theirs and mine to the Big Story.*

The public act

of receiving Holy Communion

solidifies our promise to be food for the poor,

to be shelter for the homeless,

to be powerhouses of prayer for the lonely,

the abandoned,

and all who are in need.

The Mystical Body of Christ

Inspired with the stories, we move to bring our gifts of time, talent and treasure to the altar. In praise and thanksgiving, we remember and with bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. Deepening our awareness of our oneness in the

*Communion can only happen
if we seek to be in solidarity
with our brothers and sisters in need.*

Lord, the Mystical Body of Christ, we are profoundly united to our brothers and sisters who live in poverty, who are homeless, who seek life, freedom and a sustainable means of livelihood, who come through our borders as immigrants. This is the real meaning of the Eucharistic Prayer, the community becoming Christ for one another. Jesus gave us the bread and wine as a means for us to see that it is the ordinary food and drink of our lives that must be consecrated in order to feed the world.

The public act of receiving Holy Communion solidifies our promise to be food for the poor, to be shelter for the homeless, to be powerhouses of prayer for the lonely, the abandoned, and all who are in need. In receiving the Eucharist, we pledge our daily efforts to live in solidarity with all peoples, carrying the downtrodden, the hungry and the needy in our hearts, allowing the spirit to reshape who we are and for what we stand. We are the Body and Blood of Christ. This highly personal and intimate moment of receiving Christ in our human body is at the same time a profoundly public witness of our willingness to be Christ's continuing presence in the world.

The closing act of liturgy is the Rite of Sending. With Eucharist we are blessed and sent into the world to do what we can to make a difference. It is in our attitude of mission, of being sent, that we live the fullness of communion. It is this attitude of mission that sustains Eileen and Joyce in becoming *co-madres* with migrant workers in Missouri, that sustains our missionary brothers and sisters in Central and South America, Africa and Asia, that sustains our motherhouse sisters and brothers, our retired members who spend hours in prayer and sacrifice for those in active ministry.

Solidarity: A Matter for Reconciliation

Communion can only happen if we seek to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in need. In *Ecclesia en America*, Pope John Paul II describes solidarity as the fruit of communion. The work of solidarity is “the promotion of peace with a view to achieving real justice (56).” To achieve this peace through justice each of us needs to understand the hurts and resentments, the fears and the needs of people on all sides of the border. For example, those who help at the Women’s Intercultural Center realize that not just the migrant women but the local women as well need to be heard. The resentment of the locals can only be healed as they welcome and are welcomed by the migrant women.

Our Lady of Guadalupe serves as a model and guide as we struggle to live in solidarity with neighbors who migrate to our land. Carlos, one of my co-workers, recalls how instrumental Our Lady was to his adjustment as a migrant teen. “When I saw her in the church in El Paso,” he said, “I felt that Our Lady of Guadalupe had migrated here before we did. Everything would be OK because she was here in the United States with us”

As patroness, not just of Mexico but of the United States as well, she is the link for many Hispanic. How enriching to know the story of her appearance and messages to San Juan Diego. The more I know her, the more I become aware of the beauty and dignity of her people. As Mary has done for many other cultures and nations of the world, she appears as one of the people, someone who is poor, with their color of skin, with their native features and speaks in their native language. What better example of solidarity than that given by the Mother of God?

Solidarity means listening to the poor, the orphaned, the widow and the migrant. It also means listening to our youth and providing them with education and opportunities to be not only productive as a work force but to be leaders in their communities. As Father Bill Delaney wrote in *The Wine Cellar* (Summer 2006), “One of our goals right now is to work for a just, comprehensive immigration reform, which will allow undocumented persons and their families to come out of the shadows and live in dignity.” To make this happen we must voice our concern and dissatisfaction with a congress that proposes walls, deportation, punitive measures and enforcement laws as a way to “control” immigration.

Conclusion

Immigration issues will be with us for a long time because the migration of people has been a constant factor of life from its very beginning. Floods, draughts, war, pestilence, crowded populations all play a role in the movement not just of people but of animals as well. The human spirit seeks first to survive, and then to prosper. The human spirit is resilient and even in the midst of poverty and oppression, finds a source of joy and consolation. The human person, endowed with spirit and life, knows wherein lies its true home. Whether documented or alien, citizen or detainee, being at home is the deepest longing of the human heart. As people dedicated to the Precious Blood of Jesus we seek to enter into the heart and mind of Jesus, open our hearts to his love, learn to love as he loves—totally, unconditionally, completely. Then and only then will we write a new and different story for the migrating people of the world.

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For Reflection

- **Conversion:** Anthony Gittins CSSp in his address on Religious Life says, “A dangerous assumption for religious is that we are actually people of the Spirit.” While holding the immigrant in your heart, ask the question: “What does *the Spirit* want?”
- **Communion:** What helps to foster a God centered and sacramental view of the universe so that I can embrace the earth, creation and all peoples as precious, united in the Blood of Christ poured out for all?
- **Solidarity:** In what ways can I promote cooperation and a just structure which requires equitable use of the earth’s resources, that embraces the rights of people to migrate and welcome the strangers among us?



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“Doing research for this article,” Sister Lucy writes, “I have become overwhelmed by the many studies and articles, documents, statements and research that are available on the topic of immigration. The Pew Research Center provides many statistics and interesting analysis. Both the Web site for the Vatican (www.Zenit.org) and The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org) have a myriad of statements and documents published over the last 50 years.



Is There A Stranger Among Us?

By Dien Truong, CPPS

Writing about the issue of immigration is a very sensitive and painful experience for both those who have settled and those who are new to this country. All face the same difficulties inherent in different cultures, races, politics, religion, and finances. Throughout human history, people have been on the move from one place to another, from one country to another. At one time or another, our ancestors or we were immigrants to this country for various reasons. For most immigrants, it is seeking a more secure and better life for themselves and their loved ones.

I myself became a refugee from the last days of the Vietnam War. As a Missionary of the Precious Blood with my own life experience, I feel compassion for and deeply sympathize with the newcomers to this country. Before finding comfort and security in a “new world,” I first faced the challenges and obstacles that made me feel vulnerable and uncertain. Though I looked forward to the future, I also experienced a profound feeling of loss. I lost everything—country, family, and language. I grieved over what I left behind and worried what was going to happen in the future. It felt like a “tug of war”!

When one is an immigrant, one is caught in a time of trying to reconcile the past with the future. New immigrants cannot avoid the inevitable problems that arise with themselves and with those who have settled. Many economic and political conflicts arise

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among those who have settled in a local area and the newcomers who arrive more recently. Immigrants must overcome cross-cultural considerations such as language, food, costumes and customs. There are also generation

gaps that occur in their own family and in the community.

After years of struggle, I realized that my sense of helplessness in this “strange land” only increased if I did not accept others as my friends and adapt a new culture as my own. This is my motivation in serving those who are immigrants today as I became involved in the Resettlement Program for Southeast Asian Refugee. It was a chance to open my heart and eyes before the suffering of others.

The Refugee Experience

Once the Vietnamese Immigrants had a nickname of “Boat People.” Then they became “asylum seekers” because there were no countries in South Asia that would accept them. A report on CNN captured the grief and suffering of the refugees:

If life in Vietnam was unbearable, life on the South China Sea was even worse. On CBC Radio, Dr. Tuan Tran describes his harrowing escape from Vietnam, an attack by pirates and his miraculous arrival at a Malaysian refugee camp. Refugees faced a host of perils: typhoons, overcrowded and often leaky boats, and a lack of navigational tools, brutal pirates, starvation, dehydration and illness. An estimated half of the boat people perished at sea. That's 500,000 to 600,000 human lives. Thai pirates kidnapped, raped and murdered countless numbers of boat people. Some pirates were professional bandits. Others were poor fishermen. The treasure from one overcrowded refugee boat could be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, as refugees often transferred all their assets into gold before leaving Vietnam. Humanitarian aid

organizations claimed that South Asian governments allowed the piracy to continue as a deterrent to refugees. Passing vessels would sometimes stop to save refugees by bringing them on board. But once the ship arrived with its human cargo in Singapore or some other Asian port, they were often turned away. No South Asian country would accept the refugees, many fearing that the influx was a Chinese or Vietnamese plot to upset the racial balance in Asia. The tragedy of so many people with nowhere to go brought the world's attention to the plight of the boat people.

How can we, with a clear conscience, turn a deaf ear to these suffering refugees? We have all heard the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke's gospel. What role shall we take: the chief priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan?

When immigrants arrived in either their "promised land" or begin their sojourn in a strange land, they confront various situations that take time to adjust to and add to their burden and suffering. For example, Peter Tran, a refugee living in Toronto since 1975, talks about adjusting to life in Canada. In an interview with CNN, he reflects on what it is like to go from being a lecturer in Vietnam to a dishwasher in Toronto. "Life in Canada is a big adjustment in many ways: new home, new language, new climate, new food, new culture, new costume, and new kind of job," he said. "Those over fifty find themselves a burden, unable to find work. The young, so infinitely adaptable, have an easier time."

Tran advises Canadians on the little things that they can do to help refugees. "The boat people have more difficulty adjusting to Canada than other refugees have in the past," he said. "The psychological trauma they've endured is a major factor: they suffer the loss of family, possessions, position, self-esteem and respect. Some have been raped. Others have seen

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family members killed. They carry guilt for being the survivors, the ones who got out. However, there are still a great number who remain incomplete, particularly families from Cambodia who lost members under Pol Pot's genocidal regime. And many refugees remain in jobs beneath their skill level. Despite that, thousands still arrive every year. But nowadays, they come through normal immigration channels. Not through refugee camps. Not over the sea."

The Vietnamese Community

While each individual immigrant has his or her own story, they share many experiences in common. Each community has its own cultural and political characteristics, but the first generation of immigrants have to make every effort just to survive, to build community and seek success in their new land.

Typically in the Vietnamese community, I recall that the first wave of Vietnamese who came to America were put into four main refugee camps. I was assigned to stay temporarily in the one in Oceanside, California. When the refugees were allowed out of the camp, most found jobs and homes in the surrounding area; but I chose to resettle in Chicago. The first years were hard. Tony Lam, one of the immigrants, said that he still sheds tears when he remembers the days his wife returned from her factory job producing musical instruments.

But from such beginnings, the Vietnamese community in the United States grew by leaps and bounds. Now, even though the community's per capita income is still 40% lower than the national rate, its average household income is almost the same—an indication of the strength of the family unit.

The community has also started to demand a voice in politics. One of its first efforts was to campaign to commission signs in the neighborhood bearing the name of Little Saigon, which are now visible on all major highways in Orange County, California. Phung Minh Tien, one of the campaigners, said the name was officially recognized by the state of California in 1988. From local council to state assembly, the community has started to be represented.

Compared with other Asian immigrants, the Vietnamese community is highly politicized, according to Do Qui Toan, a local journalist. “Whereas the older generations demonstrate against the government in Vietnam, demanding freedom for the homeland,” he explained, “the younger generations prefer to join mainstream politics and have a voice on taxation or health insurance policy.”

The Vietnamese community’s growing economic strength also means that many Vietnamese in the US are now courted by the nation they left behind. But often they find it hard to reconcile themselves with their homeland. Political ideology and personal memories of the war make it difficult for them to see Vietnam in a positive light. As Andy Dzung, a local architect pointed out, “We must find a way to accommodate ourselves, now that the US and Vietnam have established both diplomatic and trade relationships, for otherwise we cannot take advantage of this new development.”

Underneath the face of prosperity, the Vietnamese community in the United States suffers from deep psychological and social problems. Healing the rift with the place from which the refugees come might be able to assuage the pain and bring some measure of conciliation. “We did not come here the way other migrants came,” said social worker Phung Minh Tien. “They came to paradise to realize their personal dreams. We were like trees uprooted and planted in a foreign land. Yet those trees have now recovered and are growing. The first 30 years were devoted to survival, but nobody knows what the next 30 years will bring.”

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Biblical Foundation and Vision

The Biblical tradition lays the foundation and informs the Church's concern for immigrants. In the Hebrew Scriptures, our ancestors in faith experienced their Exodus from slavery, the Babylonian Exile and the Diaspora. In the Book

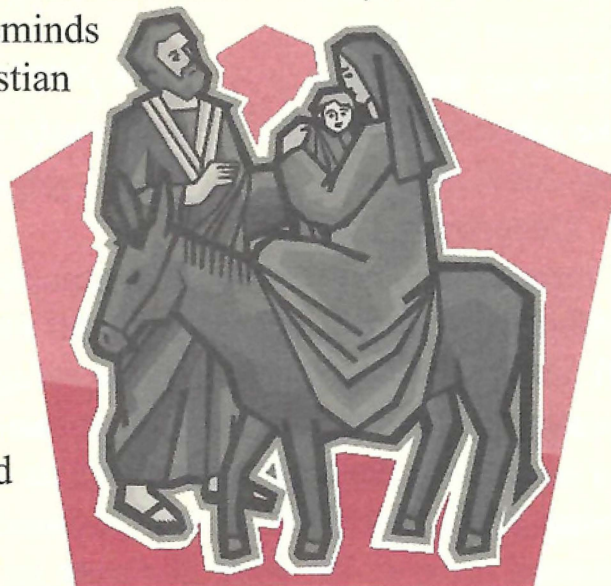
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of Genesis, the covenant God made with Abraham related to the right of seeking new opportunity in new lands (Gen 12:1). In Exodus, Moses' covenant upheld the rights of migrants: "You and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, are to go up from here to the land...(Ex. 33:1)." God's Word to the ancient Israelites, of course, are also meant for modern immigrants and for us as well.

In the New Testament, Jesus had to flee his own land for Egypt (Mt 2:13-15). As the Pontifical Instruction, The Love of Christ Towards Migrants reminds us, "In the foreigner a Christian

sees not simply a neighbor, but the face of Christ Himself." Even though we don't have much information about Jesus' early life in Egypt, this experience of being a refugee probably influenced his special empathy for the stranger as related in Matthew's Gospel, "I was a

stranger and you welcomed me (Mt 25:35)." The Pontifical Instruction also reminds us that Mary "gave birth to her Son away from home ... and was compelled to flee to Egypt (Lk 2:1-7)" and so stands a "living symbol of the woman migrant."



Each year as we read the gospel passage of the flight into Egypt, I read my own life story and feel the exile of the Holy Family. They tasted the bitterness and suffering of the life of immigrants. Even though I now pretend to live on the surface of prosperity, secure and sufficient, God continues to invite me to recall my uncertain journey and my struggle to adapt and survive from my painful beginnings. But the more I remember my early struggles and embrace my many blessings, the more I accept newcomers not as strangers but as my sisters and brothers with an understanding mind and compassionate heart.



For Reflection

- Through your faith and life experience, how can you recognize the face of Christ among strangers, namely, the immigrant?
- In what ways does your baptismal call and the blessings of your life influence your attitude toward immigrants?
- What are the issues surrounding immigration in your local area?
- How can you, your parish, or your local community become an advocate for newcomers and immigrants?



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Welcoming Christ Among Us

By Al Ebach, CPPS

*As we welcome the stranger into our midst,
we welcome Christ Himself,
for in the face of the migrant, immigrant, and refugee,
we must see the face of Christ.*

Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope

A few months ago as I blessed the house of a single mother and her three children, I asked her some questions about her employment and her children. As she related her story, I sensed some fear in her eyes and in her voice. As I pressed the issue she shared that she feared losing her job of seventeen years because of the immigration restrictions being discussed by the legislators.

All of her children were born in the United States, but she feared that if she did not have her work permit renewed, she might be separated from her children because of the possibility of a prison term and deportation. Her husband had left her for another woman so this was a tremendous weight she had to bear on her own. Her children are too young to understand the severity of the situation. Having grown up in the United States the children did not desire leaving a country they have known all their lives.

This is one of many stories I encounter on the West Side of Kansas City. Many people have been working in the United

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States for a number of years and now face the possibility of deportation. It makes little sense to call people illegal that have contributed to a society for as many years as some people have. There are people who have

worked at becoming citizens but have run into numerous roadblocks. Consequently there are many people who have been in the United States for twenty years or more and still are not documented. One of the fallacies about immigration is that people are not interested in becoming naturalized citizens.

Another fallacy is that people think migrants want to come to the United States because it is the land of enchantment. People would not leave their homelands and their families if they did not have political, economic, or sometimes, religious pressures or persecutions. For the most part, people leave their places of origin because they have completely exhausted their options. First generation people would definitely return to their homelands if the opportunity presented itself.

Motivation: Desperation

If people were not desperate about their living situations, why would they risk their lives to cross a vast ocean or an arid desert? In the summer of 2005 I had the opportunity to live near the border of Mexico, in a small community in New Mexico. I stayed with a friend who is in the funeral business. In six weeks there were nine people who were brought to the funeral home who died while crossing the desert in search of an opportunity to provide for the well being of their families in Mexico. These nine are a small percentage of the many who die on a daily basis while crossing the desert.

One of my friend's employees risked crossing the desert seventeen years ago with two small children and an infant. It was interesting to listen to her story, and how she still longs to go back to Mexico to see her family. During my stay in New Mexico I had the opportunity to go to Mexico to meet her parents and some of her brothers and sisters. She, along with people all over the world, migrated out of desperation. Some people have built

productive lives while others have ended in refugee camps. During my stay on the Mexican border I observed hundreds of people waiting for the right opportunity to cross over. People who are desperate will continue to find ways to cross the border.

Almost two years ago when I was in Vietnam I was invited to speak with migrants from Central Vietnam. They had many questions about migrants in the United States, asking whether migrants in the United States would return to their homelands if they had the opportunity. Being ignorant about migration at the time, I shared that people who come to the United States do not want to return to their homelands because of their terrible conditions. The Vietnamese migrants informed me that if they had the resources to return they would go back to their communities because they missed their friends and relatives. They informed me that they migrated because they had to provide for their families. After I returned to Sacred Heart-Guadalupe Parish and became more informed I realized that most migrants would definitely return to their homelands if the opportunity presented itself. Many migrants fear that once they leave they risk never seeing their families or homelands again.

Remembering our Stories

This past year I was invited to assist in giving workshops in various deaneries of the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese.

The workshops were basically to educate people of parishes about immigration, and we were hoping the participants would take the information to their parishes to assist in the education of others in their parish communities. In order for me to be a presenter I had to educate myself on the topic. I read many articles, watched videos and participated in marches to protest legislation proposed on the national level. The more I studied and got involved the more I realized that what was shared by immigrants at these information workshops paralleled my own story.

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As people heard my story of my ancestors, which is already a hundred years removed, they realized that times really have not changed that much. Even after a hundred years, people were having similar experiences. The difference is that now there is proposed legislation to keep migrants out, whereas, when my ancestors arrived everyone was invited to enter because they were needed to provide workers to replace men who were serving in the war.

As I related about my ancestors leaving Germany to go to Russia, and then migrating to the United States, the workshop participants could not believe that I too, after all those years, experienced a language barrier, humiliation, and discrimination. I

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thought I had put the whole experience behind me, but the more people commented about the situation the more things surfaced. For example, in college I had a professor tell me that I had better get rid of my accent if I wanted to preach. This criticism frightened me and I worked really hard to make sure I sounded like everyone else. Today I would have to ask what everyone else sounds like. Even after sixty-some years there was still obvious discrimination.

When I entered graduate school I shared this situation with my homiletics professor. He was appalled. He encouraged me to work on keeping my accent because in his experience he felt that accents seemed to invite peoples' attention. Now when I hear someone say that people who want to live in the United States should learn English, I have these little flashbacks. I realized later that the professor who asked me to lose my accent was probably second generation from Ireland. How quickly people seem to forget their stories and their histories!

Catholic Social Teaching & Immigration Legislation

There are many aspects of the immigration legislation that need to be addressed but most importantly people have to educate themselves. We need to continue to attend workshops, discussions, and information sessions, to not only be educated, but to rid ourselves of personal biases and judgments. Yes, all the information can be overwhelming, but if one has a computer it is as simple as typing in the word “immigration” and from the information provided choose points of interest. I am more involved with immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America, so I have gleaned much of my information from the pastoral letter of the U.S./Mexican bishops, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* (2003). This pastoral letter frames the Church’s position on migration and immigration, and invites people to understand the rights of those who migrate.

This pastoral letter calls people to respond to the Catholic Social Teachings. These teachings are very clear about the responsibilities of church, state, communities and individuals. Again, people need to educate themselves to get familiarized with the teachings of the Catholic Church. At the workshops we tried to educate people about immigration but we were amazed how many of the participants had never heard of the Catholic Social Teachings, and many, who had heard them for the first time, had a true conversion regarding their responsibilities as Catholics.

For the most part, our country had an open door policy for many years. But for various reasons, primarily fear of terrorists and threats to job security, our nation has put restrictions on immigration. While all nations should have the right to place restrictions on immigration, the Immigration Reform Bill should be open to invite people to stay who have been model citizens for a number of years and be able to remain in the country they have served. People who legitimately need protection from the threats of violence or war, or who need employment to feed themselves and their children, should be invited to live in peace and with dignity.

It has always been the tradition of the Catholic Church, to protect the rights of all people. Catholic Social Teaching bears out the support the church will provide for all of God’s people. Bishops throughout the nation are expressing concerns about the political rhetoric that seems to deny basic human rights. Bishop

Robert Finn wrote in the diocesan newspaper, “This principle of justice is part and parcel of our Catholic tradition, and affirms that, regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity which should be respected by other individuals and the policies of government (April 14, 2006, *The Catholic Key*).”

The Parish Resource Kit from the Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform, *Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope*, reflects the call and the challenge of immigration: “As we welcome the stranger into our midst, we welcome Christ Himself, for in the face of the migrant, immigrant, and refugee, we must see the face of Christ. In the Gospel of Luke, this is made clear in the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-15), as they become witnesses to the Truth by welcoming the stranger who is Christ.”



For Reflection

- ❑ What are some prejudices or misconceptions I have had about migrants?
- ❑ With the present political climate regarding immigration, what can I do to influence politicians to make laws that protect the rights of all human beings?
- ❑ In my understanding of scripture and Catholic Social Teachings, how can I exhibit Gospel values toward migrants or immigrants and encourage others to do the same?
- ❑ Share some personal experiences about immigration, either in your own family background, or regarding people you have associated with in your community or church.



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Continuing the Story

The blood now flowing in me—
Isn't it the same
As coursed through your veins?
And redemption's love story,
Is it not ongoing
And unlimited?
For you are Cosmic Christ,
Living in every leaf
And blade of grass
And rock and star,
Calling us from everywhere
To cherish our roots
In Mother Earth,
To grieve with her
The untimely death
Inflicted thoughtlessly
On her children, our family,
One by one.
You call us now
To continue the love story,
And with compassion
To set free
The ravishing beauty
Of the still evolving
Life Mystery
That is our world.

-Mary Schoenecker, ASC



United States Adorer Mary Schoenecker served for many years in Korea. She now works as a volunteer with Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice in Wichita, KS, as a respite/relief worker for caretakers. She also assists at the Great Plains Earth Institute.



Strangers No More

By Eileen Schieber, CPPS

As the days grow colder, so too does the environment of fear surrounding the issue of immigration in our nation. It is difficult to say whether the place where I live reflects the atmosphere of the country, but I suspect it comes close to mirroring it.

Each day brings new problems for immigrants, persons who are viewed as strangers among us.

As a people we live daily with issues of security and the sense of unease they leave with us. War, breakdown of relations with long time allies, public expressions of hate for our country, an escalating number of dead whom we grieve, and fear of economic difficulties permeate our days. There is too much to deal with mentally and emotionally. When this happens to a people it is very easy to focus on someone or something that is a vent for our frustrations and our fears. I believe that has happened with the issue of immigration. It seems to be something that many persons think we can do something concrete to address and fix. While there is no agreement on what would “fix” the situation, the many opinions expressed are vehement and polarizing. While we are a nation of immigrants, founded on their work and faith, we now want to be ever more vigilant as to which “tired, poor, and yearning to be free” we admit. A spirit of isolationism is taking root in our body politic, which seems to stem not from a desire to go it alone, but from a need to “have it our own way or not at all” and a tendency to wield the power of domination.

In this atmosphere it is difficult to bridge the gap, to reconcile the differences, to stand with others in solidarity. I struggle with this daily. In the parishes in which I work there has been a

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resentment of the local Hispanics, which is the immigrant population that impacts us. While the Hispanics here are citizens, legal residents, people here with legal permission to work, and persons who entered illegally and are working under an assumed identity, persons here tend to lump them entirely under the

last category. The most resentful are often the immigrants of other lands who proudly proclaim their legal status or citizenship and their own contribution to society. How is it possible to address the neediness arising from the ire and resentment of those who oppose the immigrants already here and the needs of those same immigrants to achieve the hopes for which they came: survival and the ability to work and support their family?

A Matter of Survival

Some of the items in my schedule each weekday include interpretation in the various clinics, service agencies, hospital, and doctors' offices. While parish members resent the Hispanic families who live here, there is a strong commitment to pro-life issues. Sometimes I try to explain to parish members about our pro-life support to the approximate 25 Hispanic women I accompany to the obstetric clinic. This is a double-edged sword, as the response often is that "they" come here just so their children can be citizens. I have never met a Hispanic family who came here for that reason. In some of the border towns women do cross the border to have their babies in the hospital and may do so for that reason, but it does not factor in to the consciousness of the persons who came here.

The persons who come north are usually young and just starting their families. They are far from the support of their own parents and extended families. They reach out to the Church Community to provide the emotional support they need as well as assistance with interpretation or other services we can provide to them. They come to survive, not merely to enhance their lives.

One mother of 5 children has been here for fifteen years with her husband. He has worked hard to support them and some of their extended family in Mexico. Celia lives in fear because they did not enter legally and have a mixed family of children, some born in the United States and some born in Mexico. She tells me if they are discovered and returned to Mexico they will be living on the street and begging for their children's food. They tried before to find work in Mexico but were unable to find anything.

Another woman, Juana, has been here 15 years and the father of the family has been here 18 years. On Monday they are returning to Mexico on order of Immigration. Their 4 children were born in the U.S. and know no other culture. When they tried to return to Mexico a couple of years ago all four children got hepatitis and other serious medical problems because they have no immunity to common bacteria and viruses found there. They have little hope of finding work in Mexico.

In the past, the search to survive led many people to our shores. They simply arrived and were processed through Ellis Island and, if there were no impediments, were free to seek their "fortune." Presently descendants of those same immigrants are trying to preserve that "fortune", and one way to do that is to deny the same freedom of entry to the present day starving and desperate people.

It is estimated that the Hispanic population pour \$4,000,000 into the economy of our small city. The majority pay taxes, contrary to popular belief, and are faithful members of the workforce. It has never been proven that they take jobs away from local people, although the myth persists. Last week I went with a Hispanic man to apply for work at the Tyson Factory. The Anglo in line in front of us refused the application for Tyson saying that there was no way he would accept "that kind of work."

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There are no strangers.*

The Hispanic man was delighted there was an opening. We can tell people of the economic contributions immigrants make and correct the misconceptions that they do not pay taxes. We can remind them of the millions paid into Social Security each year by the immigrants, some of whom will never receive the benefits.

Global Reality

Immigration in our own nation is only a part of the larger global picture. While no one, including the immigrants I know, denies we have the right to have a secure border, the means of having that eludes us. I believe that is because the border is not the real issue. The real issue is far more basic. It arises out of the fact that, in many ways, the age of nations is past and we exist in a global reality. This shift is reflected in the banding together of nations in the European Union but it is also reflected in the resurgence of old animosities of peoples who occupy or do not occupy land or territory which they regard as “theirs”, and in genocide.

In a time of great transition there is also regression out of fear and desire to maintain the reality that once existed. Nationalism and identification with nationality is precious in the consciousness of the human family and will persist in the global era. The task before us is establishing a movement toward a status of equality among the nationalities and subsets of nationalities that exist, mutual support, open trade, legitimate migration of workers, fair wages, and worker protections among the nations.

The common good we strive to preserve will be preserved only when the common good realized is a more universal reality. Since our Congregations embody a multi-national and global reality in the scope of our members and our works perhaps we have some wisdom to offer in the unfolding of the future reality of the world community.

Our Spirituality Informs our Response

In our spirituality we are formed and sent forth in the conviction that all are included in the saving power of the Blood of Jesus. We recognize the dear neighbor in each face we meet, the blood brother and sister with whom we share life. In this issue of immigration there are many persons who suffer. Those who seek survival for themselves and their families and

those who fear the diminishment that will surely follow if we truly begin to share the wealth of the earth among all of the human family are both suffering.

We are all brought near by the Blood of Christ. Do we dare call upon our society to bring near those who suffer and ask for survival from us, who are the richest nation on earth? Do we dare face with our brothers and sisters the consequences of diminishment and curtail our consumerism to share the world's resources among the peoples of the world? It is a vision of the migrant peoples as the body of Christ crucified upon the cross of the world that we must see if we are to understand fully the phenomenon of world migration today.

Reform of immigration laws permitting legitimate migration of workers with a system of identification and validation that safeguards our security deserves our attention and the hard work it would take to formulate it. It is fairly easy, though outrageously expensive to erect a fence on our southern border. It will probably not solve the problem of illegal entry but it will make some of our politicians look good if we are foolish enough to believe in it. Our spirituality is not one of building walls, but of dissolving enmities in the mercy of which we are all benefactors.

The strain to answer the fears and resentment among us has taken our politicians in dangerous directions. Our own local State Representative worked to pass the House bill that created felons of persons who assisted illegal immigrants. Church membership is universal and transcends the borders of nations. Persons have the right to worship and fellowship within their faith regardless of their race or origins. We do not ask persons at the door who want to worship with us or request our aid what their legal status might be. Under the tenets of our faith, we live out our life of service in being faithful to the law of charity and the expression of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

These are the ways we have of bringing the fruits of the blood of Christ to our world. If our Representatives have passed a law that makes the legitimate practice of the tenets of our faith a felony, how is that not persecution of religion? If a State makes it criminal for a person to live out legitimate expressions of their faith how is that not repression of religion? This controversy is truly leading us into dangerous ground.

Confronting Racism

My last reflection on the issue of immigration has to do with racism as a component for the current agenda on immigration in our country. Millions of Indians lived on this continent 13,000 years before anyone else arrived. The first people who landed on our shores were Spanish with Ponce de León in 1513 (Columbus landed in the Bahamas). The Spanish were the first to reach the Appalachians, the Mississippi, the Great Plains, and the Grand Canyon. The immigrants in our town are the descendents of these Indians and the Spanish. Even the Pilgrims are late arrivals in the light of their heritage.

The face of the United States is growing ever darker. La Morena (the dark one) is a complementary title given to some beautiful women in the Hispanic culture. The United States grows ever more similar to "La Morena". We are now conscious that at some point in our evolution white Anglo Saxon persons will be in the minority. I believe this is threatening to us, consciously or unconsciously, and drives the need to exclude persons from legitimate entry into the country. I recommend a thoughtful opinion piece in the *New York Times* on July 9, 2006 by Tony Horwitz elaborating on this phenomenon.

In our individual lives we are called to solidarity with the family of Christ established in his Blood that encompasses all persons. In our parishes we are called to be inclusive and welcoming, bringing the Good News to the poor. In our Congregations we are called to be faithful to the promise of the Precious Blood, which is that we are all sons and daughters of God, with equal dignity and right of survival and respect. There are no strangers.

In the light of these calls we are stretched and challenged to deal with the controversies surrounding the question of immigration with mercy and compassion for all. We need to find the words to bridge the gaps, to heal the wounds, to reconcile the differences. The poem on the following page by Julia Cameron reminds me of Veronica, who wiped the blood from the face of Jesus with her veil and gave his image to the world. May we do the same.





For Reflection

- How does the concern for national security affect you in your attitudes towards and interactions with immigrants?
- Have you ever had the experience of being in the minority in a situation? What did that evoke in you? Can you see what a white Anglo Saxon minority will look like?
- Reconciliation requires establishing a connection. How can connections of trust and understanding be established between migrant peoples and the people of the nations they enter? How does our kinship in the Blood of Christ foster this?
- How can we welcome the stranger and adjust our lives so that a more equitable world order may emerge? What must we leave behind or surrender in order to enter a new age of global solidarity?



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Words for It

I wish I could take language
And fold it like cool, moist rags,
I would lay words on your forehead,
I would wrap words on your wrists.
"There, there" my words would say,
Or something better.

I would ask them to murmur,
"Hush, and Shh, shhh, it's all right,"
I would ask them to hold you all night.

I wish I could take language
And daub and soothe and cool
Where fever blisters and burns,
Where fever turns yourself against you.

I wish I could take language
And heal the wounds that were the wounds
You have no names for.

-Julia Cameron