

A Lenten Journey with Immigrants and Refugees

As we journey toward the celebration of Easter, the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative Immigration and Refugee Committee offers the following reflections for the remainder of Lent that focus on the issues of immigration and refugees.

Pope Francis reminds us that “Lent comes providentially to reawaken us, to shake us from our lethargy.” May our journey be one of awakening, movement, and action as followers of Jesus.

Week 3 March 3rd 2024

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, creator of all that is. While most of us live in safe homes with at least the basic necessities of life, we know that not everyone does. Those who suffer from inadequate income, food, or safety because of the color of their skin or the country where they live are our neighbors. They may not live next door, but Jesus reminds us that even the stranger is our neighbor. Help us to be generous and welcoming as You have been to us. Show us how. Amen

Food for Thought

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church

“The universal common good calls for an organization of the community of nations able to provide for the different needs of men ...alleviating the miseries of refugees dispersed throughout the world and assisting migrants and their families.” (1911)

The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him.” (2241)

From Catholic Social Teaching

- 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 the undocumented migrants should be respected.

Questions for Journaling:

- ✚ What part of this summary of Catholic teaching about immigration is new or a surprise to you?
- ✚ What part speaks to you or is particularly challenging to you?

- ✚ What part invites you to learn more or reflect further?
- ✚ What in the Marianist Charism pushes you to get involved in migration issues?

Closing Prayer

Merciful Jesus, as an infant you fled to Egypt with Mary and Joseph. You were a vulnerable family in a foreign land, looking for shelter and sustenance. Help us to welcome those like you who cross our borders today. Give us hearts of compassion for all migrants; help us to shape a humane response to their needs and to pass laws and policies that respect the dignity of all who come to our country. Amen.

Actions

As Marianists and as Christians, what action might we commit to take (individually or as a community) to respond to this issue?

- Pray for immigrants, refugees, and all affected by the crisis at our borders.
- Study the immigration issue in more depth.
- Participate in vigils, rallies, and other gatherings that advocate for justice for refugees and immigrants.
- Visit or write to immigrants and refugees in detention facilities.
- Assist as volunteers at sites providing immigrant and refugees sanctuary.
- Become involved by writing letters to political leaders to uphold the dignity of life for asylum seekers and other migrants by passing just policies.

Week 4 March 10th 2024

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, creator of all that is. While most of us live in safe homes with at least the basic necessities of life, we know that not everyone does. Those who suffer from inadequate income, food, or safety because of the color of their skin or the country where they live are our neighbors. They may not live next door, but Jesus reminds us that even the stranger is our neighbor. Help us to be generous and welcoming as You have been to us. Show us how. Amen

Food for Thought

People who study migration speak of two reasons that people leave their homes. They are often called push and pull factors. Pull factors include economic and educational opportunities, religious and political freedom, and the reunification of families. Push factors often cited include war, violence, poverty, and famine and drought caused by the misuse of lands for economic change, which is related to climate change. Let's explore how these push and pull factors work in a geographic area close to us: Central America.

Brief History of Central American Migration

In order to understand the issue of why people are leaving their homes in Central America and trying to come to the US and why people are sending their children on a perilous journey to a hostile foreign land, we need to learn more about the history of the Central American region. Today, the factors impacting the surge of migrants from Central America include multinational corporations appropriating and misusing land for political gain, political corruption and repression, the violence of drug cartels and gangs, and climate change that has affected the ability for subsistence farmers to grow food for their families. A study of the history of this region shows that US intervention in Central America, which started in the 1950s during the Cold War, has contributed to these problems. The US involvement included the CIA overthrowing the elected government of Guatemala in 1954 and backing right-wing dictators in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua with economic and military aid in the 60's. When the Central American people began to respond to this situation, the US again intervened and supported right-wing military regimes that suppressed the uprisings. In response to death squads and counterinsurgency militias, covertly trained in the US, thousands of Central Americans fled north rather than face the possibility of death for themselves and their children. A quarter of a million people were killed, hundreds of thousands were displaced, and tens of thousands came to the US. These conflicts created many of the push factors which led to the current migration issues.

The Current Push Factors

The current situation in Central America is frightening. Jobs are not available because of abuses of power and land by multinational corporations. Widespread violence from gangs exists; children are threatened with losing their lives or the lives of their family members if they don't join a gang. (For more information about the gang problem and US involvement, see the related link). Women and girls are at risk of being raped or kidnapped and becoming victims of human trafficking. People can't make enough money to feed their families adequately. Parents can't afford to send their children to school because it can cost half of their income.

Reflection Questions

- ✚ How would you feel if faced with the conditions mentioned above? What would you imagine your options to be?
- ✚ What would you risk to get your children out of this situation?
- ✚ As a follower of Jesus and a member of the community of Marianists, how do you feel moved to respond to migrants who leave their country of origin because of the above conditions?
- ✚ Based on the Marianist charism, what would be your personal and political response to this issue?

Closing Prayer

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Actions

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Week 5 March 17th 2024

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, creator of all that is. While most of us live in safe homes with at least the basic necessities of life, we know that not everyone does. Those who suffer from inadequate income, food, or safety because of the color of their skin or the country where they live are our neighbors. They may not live next door, but Jesus reminds us that even the stranger is our neighbor. Help us to be generous and welcoming as You have been to us. Show us how. Amen.

Food for Thought

Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso issued a pastoral letter titled “Night Will Be No More” in response to the mass shooting at a Walmart in El Paso. The gunman targeted Latinos and left at least 23 dead and 23 injured. Some who were injured fled the scene for fear of being caught without valid documentation recognized by the government of the US.

Quotes from “Night Will Be No More”

4. After prayer and speaking with the People of God in the Church of El Paso, I have decided to write this letter on the theme of racism and white supremacy to reflect together on the evil that robbed us of 23 lives. God can only be calling our community to greater fidelity. Together we are called to discern the new paths of justice and mercy required of us and to rediscover our reasons for hope (cf. 1 Peter 3, 5).

12. This mystery of evil also includes the base belief that some of us are more important, deserving, and worthy than others. It includes the ugly conviction that this country and its history and opportunities and resources, as well as our economic and political life, belong more properly to “white” people than to people of color. This is a perverse way of thinking that divides people based on heritage and tone of skin into “us” and “them,” “worthy” and “unworthy,” paving the way to dehumanization. In other words, racism.

13. Racism can make a home in our hearts, distort our imagination and will, and express itself in individual actions of hatred and discrimination. Racism is one’s failure to give others the respect they are due on account of being created in the image and likeness of God. And it is more than that.

14. If we are honest, racism is really about advancing, shoring up, and failing to oppose a system of white privilege and advantage based on skin color. When this system begins to shape our public choices, structure our common life together, and becomes a tool of class, this is rightly called institutionalized racism. Action to build this system of hate and inaction to oppose its dismantling are what we rightly call white supremacy. This is the evil one and the “father of lies” (Jn 8, 44), incarnate in our everyday choices and lifestyles and our laws and institution

Questions for Journaling:

- ✚ Have you personally linked the issues surrounding immigration and refugees with racism and white supremacy? Why or why not?
- ✚ Reflect on how you feel when you think about racism and white supremacy, which are condemned by our church, are so closely linked with the immigration policies of our country?
- ✚ What actions could you envision taking to encourage reform of the current immigration policies?

Closing Prayer

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Holy Week March 24th 2024

OPENING PRAYER

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Food for Thought

Holy Week takes us on the journey of Jesus to Golgotha and his death on the cross. The last gathering Jesus has with all his followers called each of them to serve one another. This call is reenacted with the washing of the feet at our Holy Thursday Liturgy. The call to serve one another hopefully has informed all of us in our journey these last 5 weeks. Perhaps you have found some way to answer this call to service in the actions listed each week. If not, maybe this video will inspire you to think about what you can do to improve the lives of today's immigrants and refugees.

https://www.ted.com/talks/becca_heller_a_safe_pathway_to_resettlement_for_migrants_and_refugees

Closing Prayer

A Pope's Prayer for Immigrants

Merciful God, we pray for you for all the men, women and children who have died after leaving their homelands in search of a better life.

Though many of their graves bear no name, to you each one is known, loved and cherished.

May we never forget them, but honour their sacrifice with deeds more than words. We entrust to you all those who have made this journey, enduring fear, uncertainty and humiliation, in order to reach a place of safety and hope.

Just as you never abandoned your Son as he was brought to a safe place by Mary and Joseph, so now be close to these, your sons and daughters, through our tenderness and protection.

In caring for them may we seek a world where none are forced to leave their home and where all can live in freedom, dignity and peace.

Merciful God and Father of all, wake us from the slumber of indifference, open our eyes to their suffering, and free us from the insensitivity born of worldly comfort and self-centredness.

Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters.

May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand, and recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.

- by Pope Francis