



RACISM:

THE UNWELCOMING LANDS OF OPPORTUNITY

Who Are These People?

These people are taking our jobs!
They don't pay taxes!
They don't speak our language!
These people are
 lazy—dirty—different!
They are not like us!
They are unwelcome!

You may not say these things but you've certainly heard them. Have you wondered: who are **These People**? Are **They** parishioners in the back pews, students in our schools, patients in our hospitals, salespersons, gardeners—the people next door?

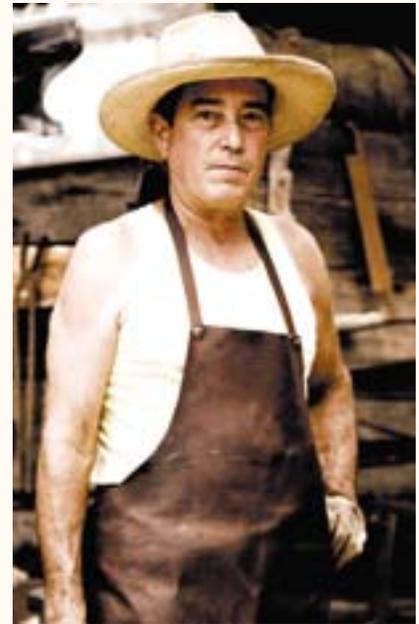
This year approximately 20 million migrants and refugees are moving from their places of birth, triple the number estimated by the United Nations in 1990. As they move, they bring their cultures, their languages, and religions, and their differences. And why shouldn't they?

Emigrating implies losses, mourning, leaving behind. It tears apart people, families, communities. To leave one's homeland is to die a little

and the migrant becomes a foreigner, robbed of familiar surroundings and the culture that once protected him. He feels obliged to hide his differences in the new environment, to look for acceptance, a chance which is sometimes denied him by the country that hosts him. (*Argentina presentation at Institute Justice Conference, 2007*)

Raimundo came from Bolivia to a farm in the Argentine Patagonia. At first he worked for a farmer who refused to pay him; then he found work with Chinese people who manufactured bricks. He and his wife are now legal residents in Argentina, both working twelve hours a day to support their five children. Life is hard but Raimundo is grateful for the help of his neighbors. "Now I don't feel like a foreigner," he says, "but sometimes I find somebody who hates Bolivians."

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries more than a million Europeans moved to Argentina. Today



migrants looking for work come there from Korea, Japan, China and from the border countries of Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay and Peru. They live in the ethnic communities of Buenos Aires and work in textile factories. They are stigmatized for causing native unemployment and despised for their facial features and skin color.

Reflecting on Racism

Immigration challenges us on many levels, but the challenge of ethnicity and race penetrates to the deepest level of our identity. As people of Mercy we serve others, give to others, interact with others. But here we face perhaps the most difficult question: Do we accept **These People** totally and equally? In our ministries, do we regard ourselves as benefactors, dispensing charity? Do we really “love the alien who lives among us”?

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*“Never speak with
contempt of any nation,
profession or class
of people.”*

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—Catherine McAuley

THE TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND RACISM

The United Nations has registered more than 100,000 Iraqi refugees and seeks long-term resettlement for 20,000 this year. But between October 2006 and May 31, 2007, the United States admitted just 701 Iraqi refugees.

Between 2000 and 2007, hate groups in the U.S. increased by 40 percent and Ku Klux Klan chapters by 63 percent. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, more than 840 hate groups exist in the U.S. (May 2007). Much of their hatred is focused against immigrants.

Resources

Brothers and Sisters to Us/Nuestros Hermanos y Hermanas.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

www.usccb.org/saac/bishopspastoral.shtml

Dismantling Racism. Joseph Barndt. Pax Christi USA, 1991.

The “Huddled Masses” Myth: Immigration and Civil Rights. Kevin R. Johnson. Temple University Press, 2003.

Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence. Laurie M. Cassidy and Alex Mikulich, eds. Orbis, 2007.

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*“God is no respecter of persons and is not to be bribed;
God secures justice for widows and orphans,
and loves the aliens who live among you, giving them
food and clothing. You too must love the stranger,
for you once lived as aliens in Egypt.”*

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—Deuteronomy 10: 18-19

Reflection

- Reflect on the stories of immigrants in Scripture: Abraham and Sarah; Joseph, son of Isaac; the Israelites in the desert; Ruth, daughter-in-law of Naomi; the people of the Babylonian “exile;” “Esther;” the Holy Family: Were they accepted or rejected as they migrated? What do their stories and their identities as Israelites/Jewish people tell us about migrants today?
- Have we as the Mercy community and members of the Catholic Church accepted our history of migration and racism? What can you do personally to heal this wound?

Action

- Invite a recent immigrant for a meal. Ask what has been her/his experience of acceptance or rejection in her/his new home?
- Go to the Southern Poverty Law Center website, www.splcenter.org, then click on “Intelligence Project.” Read about immigration and racism and notice *how* it is said. Consider your response.



EARTH:

WHEN HOME IS NOT HEALTHY

Where Is Our Home?

There are so many reasons why immigrants leave their home countries—poverty, war, famine, unemployment, persecution. Immigrants are often asked: “How could you leave your home?” They answer, “What else could I do when my land was taken, my home was destroyed, or my family simply couldn’t live there anymore?”

Pollution in Peruvian cities, deforestation in Guatemala, destruction of the coral reef in Belize—these attacks on Earth’s wellbeing link with other causes of migration. When a hurricane strikes Honduras or New Orleans, when a mudslide from denuded hills destroys a village in the Philippines, when the people who live in the rainforests of Guyana are driven from their homes by unlicensed logging companies—where do they go? How do they live? Here are some of their stories.

Simon works in a gold mine in the Philippines. He had owned a small farm where he lived with his family until the Philippine government gave the land rights to a Canadian-owned

mining company. Simon and his family were forced to leave the land worked by their ancestors. Now the land he once farmed is so ravaged it will never again produce crops. Simon has developed breathing problems because the company provides inadequate protection in the mines and he cannot afford healthcare.

Sonia lived with her family in Chimbote, Peru. She struggled to breathe because of the emissions from the steel mill, the canning and fish factories. Leaving her family behind, Sonia moved into the jungle but she is unsafe and very lonely. Her brother

emigrated to Spain, but his life too is difficult. The rest of the family still live in Chimbote, knowing the polluted air and water could someday kill them.

In every century people have left their homes because of natural disasters. “The whole world came to Egypt to buy corn from Joseph, so severe was the famine everywhere” (*Genesis 41: 57*).

In our time, negligence, greed, militarism, industrialism and unfair trade policies have added to Earth’s suffering, intensifying global warming, destroying the world’s forests, polluting the water and weakening Earth’s natural ability to restore itself.



Reflecting on Earth

On the 20th anniversary of their pastoral message *This Land Is Home to Me*, the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia wrote: “No one truly owns any part of creation. Rather all creation belongs only to God. We may be assigned to care for parts of it, but only if we serve the needs of others along with our own needs.” As we study the root causes of migration, we learn of blatant injustices that rob the poor of their land and rights and reward the rich with the spoils. The Mexican farmer who cannot sell his corn locally because imported U.S. corn is cheaper, the fisherfolk whose coastal waters have been depleted and their livelihood threatened, the indigenous people whose ancestral lands have been stolen and ravaged: these are the people who migrate in order to survive, populating the poorest sections of cities, crossing borders into dangerous territories, simply searching for work and a better life.

The grasp for natural resources is

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“Let us never desire more than enough. God will give that and a blessing.”

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--Catherine McAuley

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forcing dramatic shifts in how nations, corporations and individuals regard the common good, human rights and the preservation of our home, Earth.

As Mercy fulfills its promise “to stand in solidarity with immigrants” by serving those affected by the movement of people and by using its influence to achieve the reform of immigration policies, we must continually ask: Why are people migrating? Where is their home? How could they leave it? What are we doing to Earth—our home, their home? How can we help to correct the wrongs we see?

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“Generations come and generations go, while the Earth endures for ever.”

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—Ecclesiastes 1: 4

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THE TRUTH ABOUT EARTH AND IMMIGRATION

In Argentina, over 6,000,000 acres of forests are destroyed annually in order to expand crops, mainly soy beans. Indigenous communities live in these forests.

Two U.S. corporations, Hunt Oil and Kellogg, Brown and Root (a subsidiary of Halliburton) have nearly completed the Camisea Gas Project to extract gas from the Amazon and construct a cross-country pipeline through indigenous lands. This will destroy Peru’s rainforests and inevitably threaten the health and food security of indigenous peoples.

Six to seven tons of toxic waste result from the processes needed to mine one ounce of gold in the Philippines. Once the land is mined, it can no longer be used to grow crops. All vegetation is destroyed.

Action

- Where on Earth is your home? What would cause you to leave it? Talk to someone who has watched her home destroyed or taken from her. How did she feel about leaving? Will she ever return to her home?
- How can we as individuals and as a community use our influence to preserve and conserve Earth and its resources so that people do not have to leave their homes?

Resources

At Home in the Web of Life.
A Pastoral Message...from the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia. Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 1996.

Caring for God’s Creation.
USCCB’s Environmental Justice Program.

www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/

The Earth Charter.
Available in thirty languages.

www.earthcharter.org/

Interfaith Climate Change Network. Joining Together in Protecting Creation.

www.ProtectingCreation.org