



IMMIGRATION IMPACT:

THE INTERCONNECTION
OF OUR CRITICAL CONCERNS

Symbols of Our Critical Concerns

In the next three issues of *iViva! Mercy*, we will explore the interconnectedness of immigration and four of our other critical concerns.

For the purpose of our discussion, each of our critical concerns has been illustrated in the design above.

Immigration: A path and traveling feet depict the migrant journey.

Earth: The globe symbolizes our commitment to preserving the environment.

Identity: A fingerprint denotes our focus on who we are.

Nonviolence: The dove and olive branch are a familiar reminder of our commitment to peace.

Women: A dancing figure evokes a joyful spirit of women and the feminine.

Racism: Interlocking hands indicate the effort to achieve racial awareness and harmony.

These symbols, unified in the design, remind us that our critical concerns are living, moving together, overlapping and converging. Look for them on our website and printed materials where critical concerns are discussed.

Commitment to Service: Continuing Catherine's Mission

Catherine McAuley lived the message of the Gospel in her service to those who are poor. The Sisters of Mercy continue her mission today by committ[ing] "our lives and resources to act in solidarity with the economically poor of the world," (Direction Statement, 2005). The Fourth Institute Chapter recognized the call to intensify our responses to needs of our times and specified five critical concerns we

cannot ignore.

Economic poverty is the root cause or effect of each critical concern. As we consider migration/immigration and the pushes and pulls of the present global movement of peoples, we weave together the facts and realities of economic poverty, racism, a devastated environment, the status of the world's women and the pervasive violence that creates these tragic conditions.

Public Statement on Immigration

"The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas strive to witness to Mercy by reverencing the dignity of each person, creating a spirit of hospitality, and pursuing integrity of word and deed in our lives. As an Institute, we recognize an urgent duty and challenge to stand in solidarity with immigrants seeking fullness of life." FOURTH INSTITUTE CHAPTER, 2005

Earth

Natural disasters devastate the land, driving people from their home countries. Environmental destruction leaves workers without livelihood, forcing them to look elsewhere for work.



Multinational corporations own much of the land once preserved for small farms and wild areas, depriving local peoples of their traditional means of livelihood.

"While we place all our confidence in God, we must act as if all depended on our exertion."

--Catherine McAuley

Nonviolence

Domestic violence, war and civil strife force people to leave their homes in search of safety and peace.

Punitive enforcement measures and linking the threat of terrorism to immigration have contributed to anti-immigrant attitudes, implying that migrants are aliens, terrorists and felons.



Racism

Immigrants, migrants and refugees become "the other"—persons who are different from us. This stance violates their human dignity and their human rights.

The Community of Mercy has committed itself to deepen our response to the unrecognized and unreconciled racism past and present within our community. This mandate requires us to pay specific attention to our own behaviors and responses to immigrants, migrants and refugees.



Women

The United Nations reports that nearly half the world's migrants are women, many of them with children.

Women and children are most vulnerable to the violence of migration—trafficking, rape, kidnapping and abuse. The majority of the estimated 500,000 to 2 million persons trafficked each year are women and girls.



*"Yahweh, who does what is right,
is always on the side of the oppressed."*

Psalm 103: 6

Action

1. Talk to a person who has moved from one country to another. Listen to the experiences, feelings, joys and frustrations of that person's journey.
2. Reflect on your own history of migration. When did you or your family arrive at your present home? What help or obstacles did you encounter along the way?

Resources

Justice for Immigrants

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops sponsor this campaign and provide information, material for reflection and suggestions for action.

www.justiceforimmigrants.org

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good

This non-partisan organization is dedicated to promoting the fullness of Catholic social tradition in the public square.

www.catholicsinalliance.org

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

This is a network of grassroots organizations providing legal immigration services.

www.cliniclegal.org/

National Immigration Forum

The forum provides articles and information from around the U.S.

www.immigrationforum.org



POVERTY:

A ROOT CAUSE OF MIGRATION

Celina's Story: Life in Poverty

Celina and her family lived in Quezon City in Metro Manila, Philippines. Their home was one rented room for three children and their parents, costing 200 pesos (U.S. \$4.09) a month. Until her husband was hospitalized for a ruptured appendix, their life was hard and the children were undernourished, but they were together. But surgery, even in a government hospital, cost 30,000 pesos (U.S. \$612) a day.

Celina went to a loan shark for money. Now in debt, she realized her only hope was to emigrate to America. She found an employment agency, completed the paperwork, but had to visit the loan shark for money for tickets and agency fees. Her sick husband and hungry children could not go with her.

Two months went by, debts increased, and Celina was heartbroken at the prospect of leaving her family. Before she was scheduled to leave, a required physical revealed

that she was nine weeks pregnant. The employment agency would refuse her unless she terminated her pregnancy. Celina had to choose between losing her baby or going to prison for violating her contract. She chose abortion. For weeks afterward she hemorrhaged and her conscience gave her no peace.

Celina came to Texas and was hired as a domestic by a doctor and his family. The doctor gave her medications to stop the hemorrhaging, but she is still paying the agency and the loan sharks. She cries for her children and her husband, especially at night, even in her sleep.



What Poverty Means to Immigrants

Migration is a worldwide phenomenon and it is about poverty. Politicians and activists in the United States engage in carefully-worded arguments about what comprehensive immigration reform means, and how to deal with the situation. But while the rhetoric continues, desperately poor people—more and more of them women—are leaving their homes, countries, children and all that is familiar in order to find a way to support themselves and their families.

As our technology and communica-



tions become more sophisticated, we see more clearly that global systems do not work for far too many people. Migration is about survival. It is about the haves and have-nots. Unscrupulous employers hire immigrants who are poor to work in inhumane conditions for unregulated wages so that goods in U.S. stores can be sold cheaply, and the comfortable can maintain their lifestyles. The U.N. has concluded that because most immigrants move to escape poverty, the growing gap between rich and poor nations will cause even more people to migrate. According to journalist Charles Bowden: “For several decades our economic theology has outsourced not only American jobs but also the reality that most people on this planet must endure. We buy clothes made by children and comment on the good price.... The Third World has finally said hello and this time not even a wall will keep it silent or at bay.”

THE TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND POVERTY

- In 2005, there were 200 million migrants worldwide. According to the United Nations, 60 percent of all immigration represents people moving from poor developing nations to richer developed nations.
- The International Labor Organization reports that 185 million people around the world are unemployed and 550 million workers earn less than \$1 a day. Half of the world's 2.8 billion workers earn less than \$2 a day.
- Migrants who move from low-income to high-income countries are often able to earn an income that is 20 to 30 times higher than they would be able to gain at home.

Resources

The American Mythos. Robert Wuthnow. Princeton University Press, 2006.

Religion and the New Immigrants. Michael W. Foley and Dean R. Hoge. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Catholic Campaign against Global Poverty
<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/>

Reflection

Immigration challenges our very way of life. Immigrants like Celina refuse to watch their children starve. Her story challenges us to grow as spiritual human beings. Individual and corporate consumer practices continue to widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots, placing the idol of material gratification above concern for the common good.

Immigration is rooted in poverty, whether it originates from the causes of migration or from the struggle to find a better life in an unfamiliar land. Confronting injustice and the idolatry of materialism is difficult because it runs counter to what the marketplace teaches us about good economics. A bottom line culture is driven by spending, and thrives on corporate investments, whether or not they are socially responsible. Immigrants seeking a better life, and a society wanting to protect an unbridled lifestyle present an uncomfortable challenge. Which values will prevail?

Action

1. Talk to a person who has come from another country. Ask why she/he moved from home. How does her/his current life compare with the life left behind? What were the benefits of migrating? What were the sacrifices?
2. Spend some time in reflection with Celina. Could she have made different choices? What did she need that she did not have?