



**Society of St. Vincent de Paul
WESTERN REGION**

**Information from
Voice of the Poor**

JANUARY 2014

VOICE OF THE POOR

Voice of the Poor does not take positions for or against a political party or individual candidates. However, Voice of the Poor is interested in working with those elected officials, whether Republicans or Democrats, who support initiatives that will benefit people in poverty, children, elderly, immigrants (documented or not), and all of those served by SVdP.

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SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

EPIPHANY

On January 5, we celebrated the Epiphany, the manifestation of God in the child Jesus, and we remembered the visit of the Magi. These wealthy and aristocratic foreigners, full of holy wisdom and political connections, not only came "to do Him homage", but also to bring gifts and offer concrete help. They had a bigger picture in mind, transcending cultural and tribal borders

Today, we hear in the news about other children of the Middle East, those in Syria, who are suffering and dying because of lack of both wisdom and political will. The long-lasting conflict has affected about five million children, according to the UN.

We also hear that in the US, because of cuts in nutrition programs, twenty percent of children go to bed hungry every night; that is about 16 million children.

The realization that God became a little child is urging us to be generous with our time and resources to bring justice and fill the needs of all of those children who suffer in the U.S., in Syria and everywhere in the world. Are we open enough to see that they are just like the child Jesus, another manifestation of God among us? Can we too continue to bring gifts and offer concrete help?

DON'T BE YOUR OWN BOSS

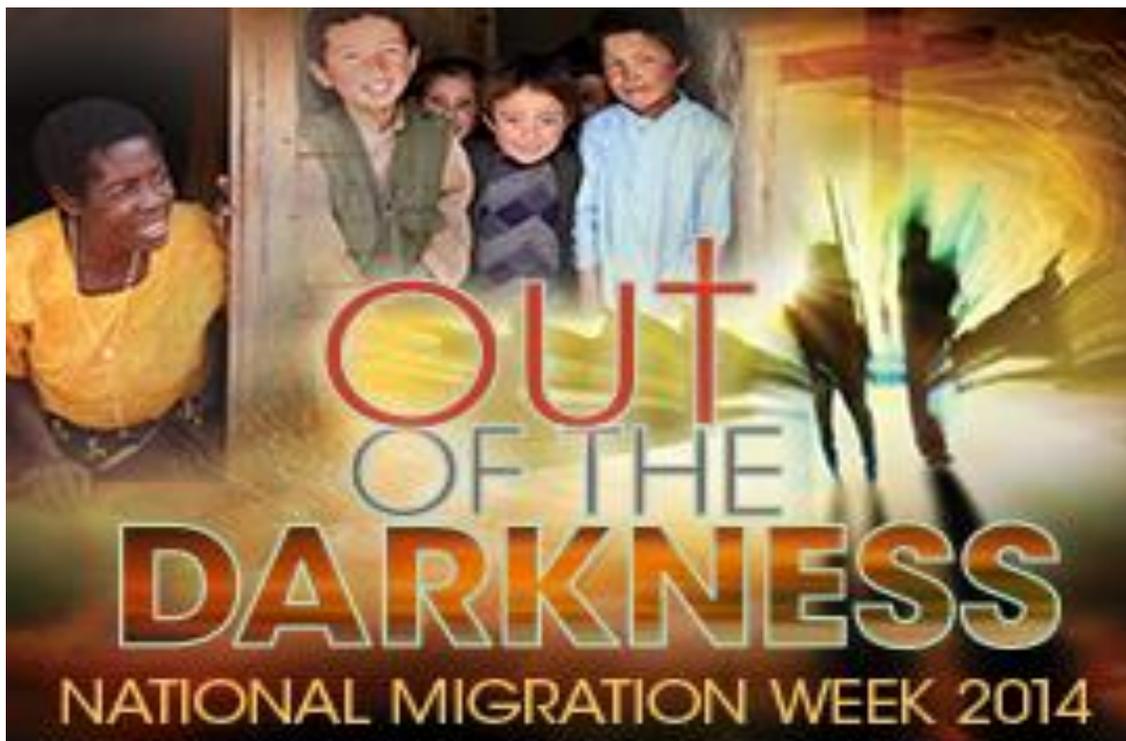
The Gospel of the Good Shepherd in which Jesus describes Himself as "the gate for the sheep" was the focus of Pope Francis' homily at a morning Mass last spring. In this Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that whoever does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, is not a shepherd, but a thief and a robber. "In short, Pope said, [this is] someone who seeks to profit for themselves, who only wants to climb the social ladder."

"The only gate to the Kingdom of God, to the Church - the Pope said - is Jesus Himself." Even within the Christian community, he continued, there are "climbers," who want to give themselves glory or choose a path to happiness that is not Christ. "People who are looking for their own [benefit] are thieves and robbers. Why? Because they steal the glory from Jesus. They want glory for themselves".

"The [true] gate is Jesus. ... How do I know that this gate is Jesus's gate?" The way to know that you have entered the fold through Christ, he added, is to live the beatitudes, "**be poor, be meek, be just**" and "**do what Matthew 25 says**" by feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick and visiting prisoners.

"Sometimes - the Pope said - **we are tempted to be too much our own bosses and not humble children and servants of the Lord**": "And this is the temptation to look for other gates or other windows to enter the Kingdom of God. **We can only enter by the gate whose name is Jesus.**

NATIONAL MIGRATION WEEK: JANUARY 5-11, 2014



Each year the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops designates the week in January beginning with the Feast of the Epiphany as National Migration Week.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has designated “Out of Darkness” as the theme of the 2014 National Migration Week. This week we remember the migration journey of the Holy Family, when they had to live in the shadows and cross the border into Egypt to escape death from the hands of King Herod.

The Church calls us to be open to today’s migrants, especially the most vulnerable: children, the undocumented, refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of human trafficking, who are living in darkness and fear and are at risk of violence and exploitation.

The Church calls us to bring them the light of Christ, to look for them at the margins of society and to provide them with a protected space in which to flourish as human beings. Reach out to these brothers and sisters through prayers, education about their rights, support for their integration into American life, and a presence in the public square advocating for Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

For more information see: <http://www.usccb.org/news/2013/13-246.cfm>

Click here to send a Justice For Immigrants e-postcard:

<http://www.capwiz.com/justiceforimmigrants/issues/alert/?alertid=62312721&type=CO>

A PRAYER FOR NATIONAL MIGRATION WEEK

(This prayer was part of the worship service for the 2012 International Day of the Migrant at Southside Presbyterian Church, Tucson, AZ)

We are a journeying people who move not only from place to place, but from sorrow to joy, from despair to hope, from alienation to solidarity, from resentment to love.

God, in our journeying we confess that too often we turn from the path that You have put before us and go our own way; we turn from You, we turn from our neighbors.

Lord, forgive us especially for turning away from our neighbors to the South and from those who cross the desert risking death in order to find life.

Turn us toward You and to those who suffer so that we might work for a day when no one dies forgotten or unknown.

Remind us that You are our True North, You are our compass leading the way to an abundant life.

IS THIS WHAT WE WANT OUR COUNTRY TO BE KNOWN FOR?

“What is happening to the immigrant family in the United States is an offense against God and the human conscience” (Archbishop Garcia-Siller of St. Antonio)

Archbishop Garcia-Siller commenting on the apprehensions of more than 24,000 unaccompanied juveniles, some as young as 5 years old, along the Southwest border in 2012, said:

“These children who are apprehended are often initially placed in short-term detention centers, where the lights stay on 24 hours a day and there are no showers or recreation spaces.

At times, the facilities are so crowded with juveniles that the children have to take turns just to lie down to sleep on the concrete floor,” he said of conditions at some facilities. “Moreover, when unaccompanied minors are apprehended and deported to their countries of origin, this is often done in ways that put them at additional risk.”

The system of issuing visas by the U.S. State Department has limits for family-sponsored and employment-based preferences and quotas for individual countries. Currently, there is a 17- to 20-year “wait” for Mexicans to acquire a U.S. visa.

“How long can we ask a father to wait to be able to feed his family and offer them a future of hope? How can you tell a mother that she must wait 20 years to reunite with her husband or children?

Can we in good conscience tell a father and mother that their children’s chance for a better life should wait 20 years?” Archbishop Garcia-Siller asked.

ARE WE SHORT SIGHTED OR NARROW-MINDED?

“Illegal is illegal.” With that rallying cry, Arizona passed SB 1070 and Alabama passed HB 56 in 2011; the latter was the harshest state immigration law in the country.

In Arizona, the infamous SB 1070 was supposed to serve as a model for the theory of “self-deportation” and for the criminalization of the undocumented.

Instead, it caused fear among immigrant communities, resulted in serious economic harm, cost the state a fortune to defend, and ultimately was gutted by the courts.

Early reports suggested success: undocumented immigrants appeared to flee Alabama en masse.

Things started to go wrong just weeks after the law went into effect, when police pulled over a German driver in a routine traffic stop. Under the law, police were compelled to arrest the man and hold him in jail until federal immigration officials could verify his legal status. However, it turned out that the driver was an executive with Mercedes, one of several foreign auto companies in the state whose plants provide thousands of much-needed jobs.

The law’s passage led to a severe shortage in agricultural workers, as immigrants – both those who were authorized to work in the US and those who were not – fled Alabama in droves.

Many unintended consequences emerged: from small towns’ police with not enough resources to hold everyone who did not have proof of citizenship, to people not getting power or water, because utilities cut off service to residents who could not prove citizenship.

HB 56 ended-up in ruins. The most far-reaching provisions proved unconstitutional, unworkable, or politically unsustainable.

Some believe that migrants come to exploit our welfare system. Let’s be real, people do not make perilous journeys, risk all their savings and sometimes their lives for the goal of getting a welfare check, a food stamp card or a housing voucher... They want to work, to help their families and the Common Good!

WHY CATHOLICS SUPPORT COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

A - Scriptures insist on welcoming the stranger among us:

"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Exodus 22:21

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says that the nations will be judged, among other things, on how they welcome the strangers in their midst. *"Come, O blessed of my father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."* Matt 25:34-35

Christ spoke plainly: a nation's failure to welcome the strangers in its midst separates that nation from God's loving plan.

B - Strangers No Longer, the USCCB Position on Immigration

In *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops (USCCB) oppose "enforcement only" immigration policies and support a comprehensive immigration reform that includes the following elements:

1. **Earned Legalization:** An earned legalization program would allow foreign nationals of good moral character who are living in the United States to apply to adjust their status to obtain lawful permanent residence. Such a program would create an eventual path to citizenship, requiring applicants to complete and pass background checks, pay a fine, and establish eligibility for resident status to participate in the program. Such a program would help stabilize the workforce, promote family unity, and bring a large population "out of the shadows," as members of their communities.
2. **Future Worker Program:** A worker program to permit foreign-born workers to enter the country safely and legally would help reduce illegal immigration and the loss of life in the American desert. Any program should include workplace protections, living wage levels, safeguards against the displacement of U.S. workers, and family unity.
3. **Family-based Immigration Reform:** It currently takes years for family members to reunite through the family-based legal immigration system. This leads to family breakdown and, in some cases, illegal immigration. Changes in

family-based immigration should be made to increase the number of family visas available and reduce family reunification waiting times.

4. **Restoration of Due Process Rights:** Restoration of the due process rights taken away by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), such as the three and the ten year bars to reentry.
5. **Addressing Root Causes:** Congress should examine the root causes of migration, such as under-development and poverty in countries of origin, and seek long-term solutions. The antidote to the problem of illegal immigration is sustainable economic development in those countries. In an ideal world, migration would be a choice, not a necessity.
6. **Enforcement:** The U.S. Catholic Bishops accept the legitimate role of the U.S. government in intercepting unauthorized migrants who attempt to travel to the United States. The Bishops also believe that by increasing lawful means for migrants to enter, live, and work in the United States, law enforcement will be better able to focus upon those who truly threaten public safety: drug and human traffickers, smugglers, and would-be terrorists. Any enforcement measures must be targeted, proportional, and humane

What would have happened to the Holy Family in their flight to Egypt... if there was a border fence?



CONGRESS IS BACK

On January 7, the House resumed its legislative sessions. Many urgent matters, affecting the people we serve, are waiting for discussion and approval. Among them:

- **Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

The Senate passed the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act - S. 744 by a strong bi-partisan vote on June 27. The House, however, has shown no interest in moving this bill forward. We hear that perhaps the House might approach Immigration Reform on a piecemeal basis, addressing some provisions and not considering others. This is unfortunate, because anything short of a comprehensive approach will have unintended consequences and will not be a real solution to this critical problem

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

The House/Senate Commissions set-up to reconcile the Farm Bill, of which SNAP is part, has not concluded its work. It appears that further severe cuts of SNAP benefits are a real possibility; these will be in addition to the cuts that have already taken place on November 1 of last year.

- **Unemployment Insurance Extension**

Unemployment benefits expired on December 28, leaving 1.3 million struggling unemployed workers and their families facing uncertainty and hardship. Congress allowed Unemployment Insurance to expire, right in the middle of the holidays, adding further stress to these families

As 2014 is an election year, many argue that re-election will be the focus by members of Congress, taking all their attention. Others think that perhaps between the primaries and the general elections, with many political uncertainties removed, there might be a window for achieving concrete progress, on issues such as immigration.

We believe that, in spite of 2014 being an election year, we should continue to expect from our elected representatives that they continue to take seriously their responsibility to address critical issues.

In a democratic system, elections are the way for us, ordinary citizens, to approve or disapprove the performance of our current representatives and perhaps replace them, if necessary. **What a wonderful opportunity to hold them accountable!**

We need to take this responsibility seriously and be clear with our elected representatives about our expectation that their job is to represent us and to address the critical issues, affecting the people we serve, with justice and compassion, while bearing in mind the common good.

The national apparatus of both parties tries to hold representatives hostage, forcing them to follow a rigid party discipline directed at consolidating their power. In addition, we all know how they try to defy the rules of democracy by periodic re-districting to perpetuate party advantage. Those are all practices we disagree with and they should be part of what we hold our representative accountable.

Democracy requires the checks and balances that can only be there through our active participation. Please do your best! Also, help other Vincentians to become comfortable with public life. Too many are still afraid of getting involved, afraid that others would see them as partisan when taking a position for the people we serve, afraid of committing to advocacy and justice.

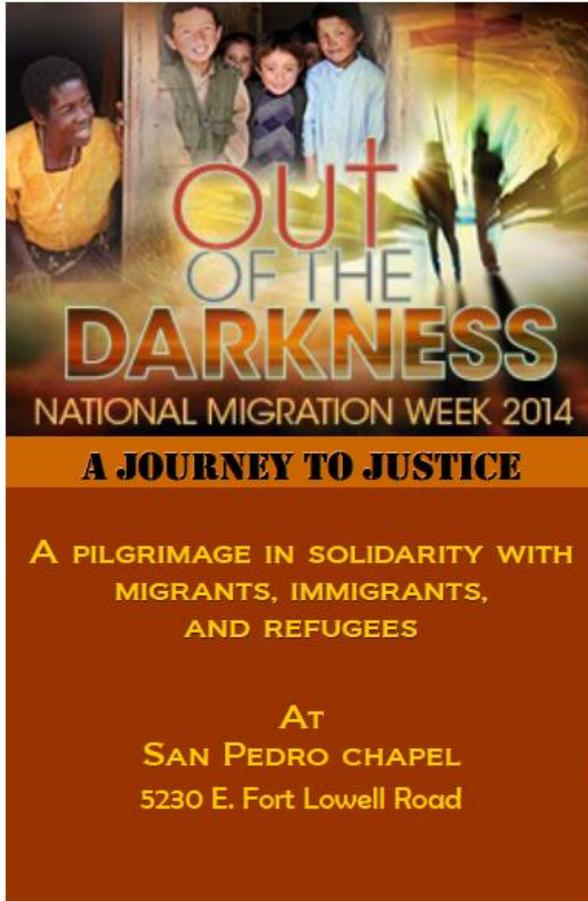
"The problem which divides people today is not a political problem; it is a social one. It is a matter of knowing which will get the upper hand, the spirit of selfishness or the spirit of sacrifice; whether society will go for ever-increasing enjoyment and profit, or for everyone devoting themselves to the common good ..."

Blessed Frederic Ozanam

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See future events in Appendix below:

TUCSON – A PILGRIMAGE IN SOLIDARITY WITH MIGRANTS



OUT OF THE DARKNESS
NATIONAL MIGRATION WEEK 2014
A JOURNEY TO JUSTICE

**A PILGRIMAGE IN SOLIDARITY WITH
MIGRANTS, IMMIGRANTS,
AND REFUGEES**

**AT
SAN PEDRO CHAPEL
5230 E. Fort Lowell Road**

Sunday - January 26, 2014

Option A: 2:00 PM

Journey from Swan Rd. parking area
at Rillito River

Option B: 3:00 PM

Journey from shrine at San Pedro Chapel

Meeting together at the shrine, pilgrims will process to prayer stations joining in prayerful solidarity with those who seek a better life for themselves and their families.

The procession and prayer together will culminate in the San Pedro Chapel - a place of worship built to provide spiritual care for migrant workers.

Stories of persons "living in the shadows" and longing to journey out of the darkness will be shared and opportunities to act in support of them will be of-



Co-hosted by the parishes of:
St. Cyril of Alexandria
St. Francis in the Foothills

2014 CATHOLIC SOCIAL MINISTRY GATHERING "A CHURCH THAT IS POOR AND FOR THE POOR"

FEBRUARY 2-5, 2014 • WASHINGTON, DC



www.catholicsocialministrygathering.org

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Department of Peace, Justice and Human Development is hosting the 2014 **Catholic Social Ministry Gathering**, Feb. 2-5, 2014, at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. The words and vision of Pope Francis: *Becoming "a Church that is Poor and for the Poor"* inspired the theme of the gathering.

Some of the highlights include:

- John L. Allen Jr., senior correspondent for *National Catholic Reporter*;
- Rev. James Martin, S.J., Editor-at-Large of *America* magazine; other notable speakers and policy experts;
- Informative workshops on pressing current issues, including: Economic Growth and Inequality; Criminal/Restorative Justice; and Human Trafficking.
- Young Leaders Initiative and with participation of university and college leaders.

Join the SVdP leadership and Voice of the Poor Regional Representatives at this important meeting! For more information or to register, please click on the following link:

[Register for the 2014 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering](#)