**SOJOURNERS on the issues**

*A discussion guide from the editors of* Sojourners *magazine*

This series is designed to spark discussion and thought about how to live out God's call for justice in our world. This guide includes four sessions, each with *Sojourners* articles, questions for discussion, and ideas for further study. We recommend printing out the guide for each person and allowing everyone time to read before the group meets. The resources here are a starting point for a further journey—where will the Spirit lead your group?

# Welcoming the Stranger: Christians and Immigration

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Though the vast majority of people living in the United States have immigrant ancestry, the nation's immigration policy has at times failed to welcome strangers who come seeking religious, political, and economic freedom. This guide, a collection of current pieces and articles from past decades, is part of a series designed to spark discussion, thought, and action about how to live out God's call for justice for all our neighbors.

# Christians and Immigration: Welcoming the Stranger

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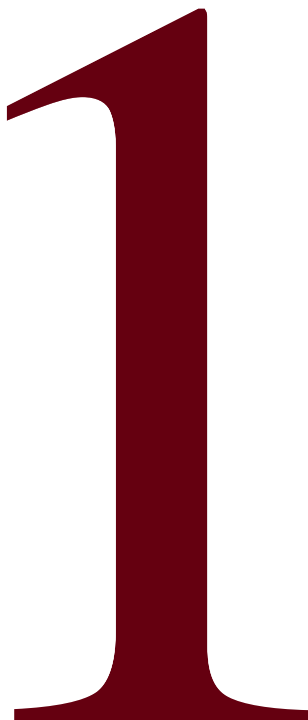

## SESSION 1

## *"Remember That You Were Aliens in the Land of Egypt"*

- "A House for All Peoples," by Ched Myers
- "The Hospitality of God," by Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Israel's history—as seen in Isaiah and reiterated by Jesus—was one of frequent marginalization. God commands that we not forget our history and that we remember to make a place in God's house for all peoples, as Myers lays out in this Bible study. Looking to the examples of the ancient Hebrews, the medieval church, the Confessing Church during World War II, and others, Bill Wylie-Kellermann illuminates how the church became known as sanctuary, a space free from fear of violence.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What scriptures inform your views on a Christian approach to immigration, migrants, strangers, and hospitality?
2. In what ways has your church or groups with which you are involved offered refuge to those suffering or marginalized? Are there ways that aspects of your ministry or work could be strengthened? Was your church, or others in your denomination, part of the Sanctuary Movement?
3. What is the story of your own family history? Why did your immigrant ancestors leave their land of origin? What kind of welcome did they receive in the United States? How did it affect them?
4. Does your church have a national flag on the altar? How might this be an opportunity to engage in discussion about the sanctity of the altar? Use the examples in Wylie-Kellermann's article to create your talking points.

### RESOURCES

- "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope," by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, was issued in 2003 to help Christians explore a faithful response to the challenge of balancing immigration rights and border security. (www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml)
- "You Welcomed Me," a pastoral letter on migration developed by the Arizona Catholic Conference and the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Van Nuys, California, in 2005, looks at lessons from scripture and Catholic social teaching from the perspectives of pastoral leaders on the U.S.-Mexican border. (www.catholicvision.org/migrationpastoral1.html)
- The Human Rights Coalition-Indigenous Alliance Without Borders, a Tucson, Ariz.-based grassroots group, offers border news and action alerts. (www.derechoshumanosaz.net)
- *American Diaspora: Poetry of Displacement*, edited by Virgil Suárez and Ryan G. Van Cleave, examines the difficulties and joys of creating "home" in the context of exile, displacement, and migration through the work of poets including Allison Joseph, Marianne Poloskey, and Sherod Santos. (University of Iowa Press, 2001)

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# A HOUSE FOR ALL PEOPLES

*by Ched Myers*

There have always been two Americas: that of rich and poor, of inclusion and exclusion. The America of inclusion found expression in the ideal of "liberty and justice for all," and has been embodied whenever Indian treaties were honored, and in the embrace of civil rights, women's suffrage, or child labor laws. The America of exclusion, on the other hand, was articulated in a Constitution that originally enfranchised only white landed males and has been realized in land grabs, Jim Crow segregation, Gilded Age economic stratification, and restrictive housing covenants.

These two visions of America continually compete for our hearts and minds, not least in our churches. On one side are the voices of Emma Lazarus in her poem "The New Colossus" ("Give me your tired, your poor..."), and Martin Luther King Jr. when he preached "I Have a Dream." On the other side are those of George W. Bush's imperial politics and James Dobson's "Focus on the Family."

Perhaps the most consistent battleground between the two Americas, from inception to the present, has concerned immigration. Where our churches locate themselves on this political and theological terrain is profoundly consequential.

All social groups establish boundaries—whether physical impediments, such as fences or borders, or symbolic and cultural lines, such as language or dietary laws. Such boundaries can be a good thing, especially when they help protect weaker people from domination by stronger people. More often, however, boundaries function in the opposite manner: to shore up the privileges of the strong against the needs of the weak. It is this latter kind of boundary that characterizes the current U.S. immigration debate and that the Bible consistently challenges.

Torah warns the people not to discriminate against economic or political refugees, since in God's eyes even Israelites are "but aliens and tenants" in the land (Leviticus 25:23). Instead they are to stand in solidarity with the "sojourners in our midst" (Deuteronomy 24:14). This is later reiterated in the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). I want to go beyond these well-known exhortations, however, and examine one text from each Testament that together make a powerful case that the very health of our body politic depends upon our embrace of "outsiders."

ISAIAH 56:1-8 is the opening stanza of the prophetic oracle sometimes referred to as "Third Isaiah." The parts of the book of Isaiah known as Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55) and Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66) represent the work of prophetic successors to the great eighth-century prophet himself: the former during the exile to Babylon, the latter during the "reconstruction" period following the return. These writings arose out of prophetic "schools" (see for example 2 Kings 4:38), in which disciples recontextualized the word and work of their teachers in another historical moment. This is, of course, what all preachers do every time we try to proclaim the Word in the midst of a given social situation.

Isaiah 56:1-8 is his "invocation," setting a tone of radical inclusion, envisioning a time when people from all over the world, including ethnic outsiders and other minorities, will be welcomed as full members into God's house. The prophet reiterates this theme at the close of his oracle as well: "The time has come to gather all the nations and tongues; they shall come and behold my glory" (Isaiah 66:18). This is the "new heaven and new earth" that Yahweh intends to bring about (66:22).

## A House for All Peoples (cont.)

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Scholars date Third Isaiah sometime in the first two generations of the exiles' return from Babylon, between the reconstruction of the temple (circa 515 BCE) and the time of Nehemiah (circa 444 BCE). There were many issues facing those trying to rebuild Israelite society under the imperial rule of Persia. Those who had been exiled to Babylon were the upper classes of Israelite society: priests, managers, the landed aristocracy, scribes, etc. The peasant majority, however—the "people of the land"—had remained behind in Palestine, working the land and scraping out a living, as the poor have always done under any regime. As the elites began to trickle back, they set about trying to re-establish their title to land, social status, and political position.

Clinton Hammock, in a monograph analyzing in detail this social and historical context, argues that these returnees were a mixed bag and included land speculators and carpetbaggers trying to take economic advantage of the new settlements; priests determined to re-establish a cultic center as their power base; ultra-nationalists who saw a chance to rebuild old dreams of sovereignty; and political front men for Israel's Persian overlords. They all agreed on one thing, however: They would define and lead the reconstruction project.

It is not hard to imagine, then, their conflicts with the existing population over property, politics, and religion, and indeed we hear allusions to this in Nehemiah 4-6. We need only think of the situation of Palestine since 1948, also a struggle between longtime residents on the land being disenfranchised by ideologically motivated and politically and militarily powerful "returnees."

The strategy of the elites was to purge the "people of the land" by establishing new ethnic purity standards, focusing on shoring up boundaries of marriage and nationality. The Persians were supportive of such measures, as they wanted their colony to be ethnically uniform to better enable their imperial management. Thus Nehemiah forbids future intermarriages (Nehemiah 10), while Ezra goes further, demanding the divorce of foreign wives (Ezra 9-10). This position was likely legitimated on the basis of Deuteronomy 23:1-8, which specifically excluded "from the assembly" males who were not sexually functional, the "illegitimately" born, and foreigners.

It is not hard to understand why the peasants resisted these attempts to exclude them, and Third Isaiah emerged as their advocate. He argues against the position of Ezra and Nehemiah, taking issue specifically with their view that the nation is best protected through purity codes. Instead, the prophet calls for the community to be preserved through ethical behavior: Whoever keeps the Sabbath covenant is entitled to full inclusion. He underlines the point using two "extreme" examples: eunuchs and foreigners.

The oracle begins with a dramatic exhortation: "This is what God says: 'Defend justice! Do what is right! Then I will vindicate you!'" (Isaiah 56:1). From the outset the issue is justice, defined in 56:2 as obeying Torah, keeping Sabbath, and turning away from evil. The prophet is invoking Sabbath as the heart of Torah ethos, with its twin social concerns to 1) Constrain greed: Everyone must have enough and the gifts of creation should circulate rather than concentrate (Exodus 16:16-19) and 2) Deconstruct poverty: releasing those who groan under the burden of debt (Deuteronomy 15) and allowing the poor to glean the surplus of the fields (Exodus 23:10-12).

But Third Isaiah goes further, addressing those who are being legally and socially excluded on the basis of purity. We hear the voice of those who have internalized this rejection in terms of their self-worth and social prospects: "Let not the foreigner say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; Let not the eunuch say 'I am just a dry tree.' For this is what God says..." (Isaiah 56:3).

## A House for All Peoples (cont.)

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The excluded throughout history know all too well the self-hatred that comes with second-class citizenship: black children trying to scrub their skin white, immigrants changing their names, women keeping silent, gays and lesbians staying deep in a destructive closet—all to avoid the contempt of a society that barely tolerates them. But God, writes Third Isaiah, says differently; one commentator portrays the prophet's rhetoric here as implying a new legal ruling on case law.

The eunuch who keeps the Sabbath covenant will receive "in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (56:5 is a play on the Hebrew word for eunuch, which comes from a root meaning to castrate). The prophet knew very well that eunuchs were, according to Levitical strictures, supposed to be "cut off" from benefits of cult and family life, which would mean their names would also be lost to posterity, an ancient way of rendering someone socially invisible.

Instead, God promises an honored place in the "house," something better than pride of genealogy or title to land. This is symbolized by a special "monument" and an "everlasting name." (Playfully, the Hebrew word rendered as "monument" is yd, which can also be a euphemism for "penis.") This is a poignant word to the current debate over exclusion of lesbian and gay people from full status in church and society.

The only people below eunuchs in the social hierarchy were foreigners—and this is exactly who the prophet next addresses. If foreigners follow God and observe the Sabbath covenant, "I will bring them to my holy mountain, and their sacrifices will be acceptable. Because my house will be known as a place where all nations pray" (Isaiah 56:7). This is Third Isaiah's answer to Ezra and Nehemiah's culture war on those who didn't fit the national ideal.

In his view, the Jerusalem temple was meant to be a world house, not a national shrine (as every other temple in antiquity was). Yahweh welcomes whosoever desires to follow the Way, regardless of who they are in their somatic or ethnic identity. Third Isaiah's perspective did not, however, prevail against the ethnocentric strategy of Ezra and Nehemiah. Indeed, many of those kicked out of the newly proscribed Judean body politic ended up as the despised "Samaritans" of Jesus' day. But God's Word did not prove fruitless.

MORE THAN FOUR centuries later, a young Jesus of Nazareth, preaching his first sermon, looked hard at his audience and proceeded to read from the heart of Third Isaiah's oracle (Luke 4:18 parallels Isaiah 61:1). Jesus may have staked his entire ministry on a reappropriation of this prophetic tradition. He invokes it again at the culmination of his struggle with the public authorities in Jerusalem: In the midst of his dramatic "exorcism" of the temple, Jesus quotes directly from our text: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Luke 19:46 parallels Isaiah 56:7). It was this vision of radical inclusion that animated Jesus' constant transgressions of the social boundaries of his day: eating with lepers, hanging out with women, touching the impure, teaching the excluded. More than anything else, it may have been what got him strung up.

Jesus most clearly addressed this issue in an oft-overlooked parable found in Mark's gospel. "There is nothing which goes into you that can defile you; only that which comes out of you defiles you" (Mark 7:15). This teaching is another prophetic skirmish with the social function of the purity code. Mark's Jesus is defending his disciples' practice of sharing table fellowship with the "unclean" outsider (Mark 7:1-5) by insisting that "What goes into a person's body from the outside cannot contaminate it" (7:18). Mark presents this parable as one whose meaning the disciples must not miss (7:17)!

## A House for All Peoples (cont.)

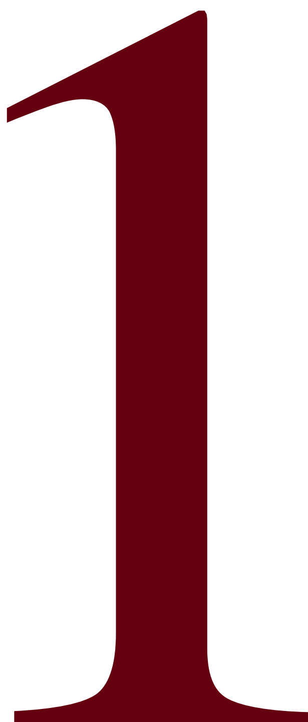
Jesus is proposing the physical body as a symbol of the "body politic" of the nation (a metaphor employed also by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12). His point—which echoes exactly Third Isaiah's argument—is that the social boundaries constructed by an exclusionary purity code are powerless to protect the integrity of the community, which can only truly be "corrupted" from within. In what may be at once his most radical and most widely ignored teaching, Jesus rejects all culturally proprietary boundaries that allegedly protect a community from perceived external threats. Scapegoating or excluding outsiders cannot protect us; we must look to our own ethical behavior. "Only that which comes out of you defiles you" (Mark 7:20).

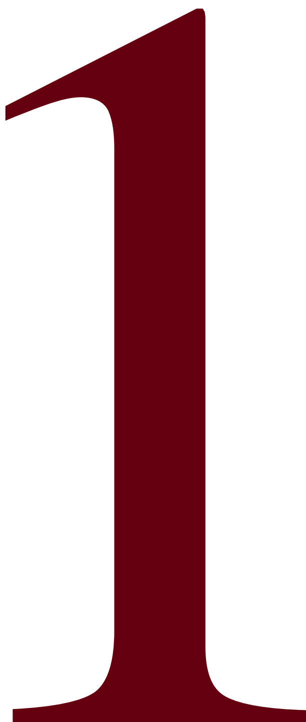
The episodes that immediately follow in Mark's narrative underscore the point. Jesus' own male and ethnic honor is challenged in the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman. In the sole gospel instance of Jesus losing a verbal joust, he concedes the justice of this female foreigner's insistence upon inclusion (Mark 7:24-30). The expanded circle of enfranchisement is then illustrated by the feeding of Gentile multitudes (Mark 8:1-9). Jesus then warns his disciples to "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Herodians" (8:15), which represents the social and political exclusivity that jeopardizes the "one loaf" around which the church is called to gather.

TO BE SURE, issues related to the continuing and often involuntary migration of peoples, and to the geopolitical definition of human communities, are complex in the modern world and deserve our careful reflection and deliberation. But these are finally theological and pastoral issues for Christians, and we must seek to know immigrants and refugees not as statistics but as human beings who endure extraordinary hardship and trauma in their struggle to survive.

And for U.S. citizens, these are issues of national identity. Israel's ethic of compassion toward outsiders was shaped by its own history of pain: "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:21). We, too, are a nation of immigrants. Amidst the current culture wars that marginalize immigrants and refugees, then, our churches must choose which America we embrace. To do that we must "hear and understand" Jesus' teaching afresh (Mark 7:14), and that of Third Isaiah before him. If we refuse to take sides with today's outsiders, we too are "without understanding" (Mark 7:18). ■

*Ched Myers, involved for many years with immigrant rights issues, lived and worked in Oak View, California, with Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries when this article appeared in the April 2006 issue of* Sojourners.





# THE HOSPITALITY OF GOD

***by Bill Wylie-Kellermann***

In 1982, a Methodist congregation in Detroit made a public declaration that its sanctuary would serve as a refuge for resisters of draft registration. It set out the spiritual welcome mat and later commended the practice to sister and brother congregations. In the debate that ensued there was animated discussion about war, civil disobedience, and the portent of a draft. Lacking in the debate was the most forthright suggestion that the whole proposal simply acknowledged the proper theological and historical implication of a Christian sanctuary. The church had merely recommended that sanctuaries be sanctuaries.

The ancient notion that altars, holy sites, and temples be regarded, by their very nature, as places of refuge is not uniquely biblical or Christian. Sanctuary was a more or less formalized practice, for example, in Egypt, Syria, Greece, and Rome. Political fugitives, criminals, debtors, and slaves on the run all passed beyond the pale of revenge and justice by making it into the precincts of a recognized shrine.

A specifically rich history and theology of the practice, however, exists within biblical tradition. Psalm 27 appears to be a sweet song of trust in God elaborated from the refuge and security of the altar:

*The Lord is the refuge of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*
*When evildoers assail me, uttering slanders against me, my adversaries and foes,*
*they shall stumble and fall.*
*Though a host encamp against me, my heart shall not fear....*
*One thing I have asked of the Lord,*
*that will I seek after;*
*that I may dwell in the house of the Lord*
*all the days of my life,*
*to behold the beauty of the Lord,*
*and to inquire in the temple.*
*For God will hide me in shelter*
*in the day of trouble;*
*and conceal me under cover*
*of the Lord's tent*
*setting me high upon a rock....*

The main incidents of the claiming of sanctuary in the history of Israel occurred when Adonijah and later Joab sought protection from Solomon by laying hold the horns of the altar (1 Kings 1-2). But the most clearly spelled-out tradition of sanctuary is found in the Torah passages concerning the "cities of refuge" (Exodus 21:13-14; Numbers 35:6-28; Deuteronomy 4:41-43; 19:4-13).

The six Levitical cities named in Deuteronomy apparently reflect the historical fact that the right of asylum was commonplace at the local altars of Yahweh. When worship was centralized under the Deuteronomic reforms, the local shrines continued to function as places of refuge, and the cities were afforded a special vocation in that respect. The residents of these towns were charged with a rigorous task of protection, "lest innocent blood be shed" (Deuteronomy 19:10).

The asylum of the refuge cities was specifically for those accused of manslaughter—killing without intent. By the law and tradition of bloodguilt, the accused were subject to the private justice of vengeance ("An eye for an eye...."). The sanctuary, in

## The Hospitality of God (cont.)

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the interest of justice, provided a break in the cycle of vengeance. At the city gate, a limit to the violence of pursuit was established. The killing stopped there.

Perhaps the most ancient instance of sanctuary was that granted to Cain. He was, admittedly, a premeditated murderer. The earth cried out for blood vengeance and his curse was to be forever a fugitive and wanderer. Nevertheless, in response to Cain's plea God granted mercy and marked a limit to violence. The notorious mark of Cain was not really the public stigma of shame so often represented. It was a mark of protection. He carried upon his very person the refuge of God. He was a walking sanctuary, as it were.

SANCTUARY IS QUITE literally a sign and space of nonviolence: Check your weapons at the door. Indeed, in the early church, it was the ministry of protection and mediation that by far preceded any public or civil acknowledgment of Christian sanctuary. "The early Christian Church," one historian notes in *Sanctuaries and Sanctuary Seekers*, "was strongly opposed to the shedding of blood, and ready to do all in its power to prevent violence which might result in bloodshed. Thus, the clergy speedily became intermediaries between criminals and those who desired vengeance, and acted as ambassadors of mercy before the throne of justice." Fugitives were protected, slaves interceded for (think of Paul's letter to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus), and debtors sheltered until a bargain could be made or forgiveness given. In particular the growing recognition of the office of bishop as intercessor paved the road to the sanctuary door.

Certain illustrations of sanctuary incidents in medieval England portray the fugitives at the door or near the altar with daggers in their hands. The historians and scholars are quick to point out, however, that this is a "blemish" on their accuracy, for "everyone in England knew full well that the Church never suffered any sanctuary seeker to approach who bore in their hands or on their person any kind of weapon."

In one of these paintings, the sanctuary seeker at Hexham is sitting on the *frith stool*, or peace stool, a stone seat often placed near the altar, especially in the designated sanctuaries of England. In the foreground of the picture, with a firm gesture of rebuke, a member of the clergy blocks the way of intruders who have violated the gates, perhaps with weapons of their own.

From the Levitical cities of refuge to the heyday of sanctuaries in England, sanctuary nonviolence has not been passive or sedentary, despite being grounded in the altar.

Another notable epoch of active sanctuary nonviolence occurred during the Peace of God movement in 11th-century France, a time of social and political chaos. Petty principalities squabbled over turf, private armies defended and devoured property, the judicial system was all but worthless, and debtors were hounded with a vengeance. The movement preached and prayed and negotiated and compacted peace. And the common reverence for sanctuary often bought time and played a role in these ministrations and restraints.

SANCTUARY SEEDS ITS nonviolence in history and implies resistance, beginning at the altar. In the mid-1980s, a Methodist congregation set upon its front lawn a large sign bearing the international symbol for nuclear-free zone, a region where nuclear weapons are neither built, nor based, nor permitted traverse, nor relied upon for military security.

For a church to declare its building a nuclear-free zone is either redundant or lucid: The weapons are perforce excluded, in fact and in spirit. A geography, very nearly a realm, of nonviolence is suggested and represented: not a bomb shelter, but a sanctuary circle of refusal and rebuke. On this end of our bloody history, the church

## The Hospitality of God (cont.)

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might yet declare itself the limit of nuclear violence: The arms race stops here.

The sanctuary as sanctuary celebrates the sovereignty of God in history and our lives, marking the limit of civil authority. The long arm of the law stops and knocks at the front door. Because the foundation of every state or political authority has recourse to (more or less) "legitimate" violence, and because they more or less pretend to the sovereignty of God, these issues are not entirely separable.

Although the function, practice, and theology of sanctuary is not to be circumscribed by civil acknowledgment, in the history of the church Christian sanctuary has enjoyed various seasons of legal recognition. It is provoking to reflect that Constantine was probably the first to sanction it early in the fourth century (though initially as a simple delay of pursuit while clergy made intercession). Whatever might be impugned cynically about the depth or reality of Constantine's conversion, whatever might be said (and much ought) about the seduction of the church by the emperor, here was symbol and acknowledgment by the emperor of limit to his own authority.

For all the politics, there's something intriguing in the picture of Constantine leaving his guard outside the door and seating himself (with the permission of the council) on a stool to listen in on the theological debate at Nicea. Not many years prior, under the political rituals of the imperial cult, any statue of the emperor had been the seat of legal sanctuary—even clinging to his picture had been sufficient to afford protection from pursuit and suspension of civil law.

The period and place, however, of greatest exercise of sanctuary privilege was in medieval England, where for several centuries at any given time there were more than a thousand people under protection of the church's peace. The ecclesiastical turf was carefully set forth, and elaborate procedures for the sanctuary seeker obtained.

One of the most interesting corollaries of English sanctuary law was a provision for "abjuration of the realm," whereby a person accused of a felony and admitted to the church might forswear the right of all protection under the king's law and be permitted a strictly limited time to travel on foot to the nearest port and quit the kingdom, never to return except by the king's leave. It was as though every church door stood at the very boundary of the nation-state.

UNTIL RECENTLY THE notion of sanctuary had fallen into widespread disuse. In the United States particularly the practical theology of sanctuary has been subject to confusion and neglect. The intrusion of civil religion is a prime candidate for cause on this score. Picture the altar of your own local congregation. Is there a flag in the sanctuary? I know of certain young and impetuous pastors who have attempted with great ceremony and as a sort of dramatic sermon illustration to remove the flag from their chancel. The whole affair ends badly in something of an unresolved wrestling match with disgruntled parishioners. The confusion is deeply and emotionally held.

Perhaps in another context the dangerous idolatry, the political implications of our theological confusion might be more plainly evident. Eberhart Bethge reports that after Hitler seized power in January 1933, the altar of Magdeburg Cathedral, like many other churches in Germany, was surrounded with swastika flags. From the pulpit, the dean of the cathedral explained:

> *In short, it has come to be the symbol of German hope. Whoever reviles this symbol of ours is reviling our Germany. The swastika flags 'round the altar radiate hope—hope that the day is at last about to dawn.*

It was an invasion—the precursor of many to come.

But not every sanctuary door and altar was so easily accessible to the spirit of

## The Hospitality of God (cont.)

power. On perhaps the same Sunday morning Dietrich Bonhoeffer preached a different word:

> *The Church has only one altar, the altar of the Almighty...before which all creatures must kneel.... He who seeks anything other than this must keep away; he cannot join us in the house of God.*

In France, the village of Le Chambon became a city of refuge for Jews fleeing the Nazi persecution. Its central figure was Andre Pascal Trocme, the town's Protestant minister. He pastored the little village into a community of compassion—a refuge where genuine hospitality was resistance.

Le Chambon was the very incarnation of sanctuary. Its residents took risks and suffered loss, and some of them died—all as a matter of course, as though it were simply in the nature of things and part of what it meant to be human.

The suggestion that sanctuary is not finally a place or a building made with hands but embodied in a person or a people is not new. In fact it is recognizably biblical. In John's gospel when Jesus drives the moneychangers out of the temple, he engages in the following remarkable exchange with the authorities:

> *"What sign have you to show us for doing this?"*
> *"Destroy this temple* [naos—*sanctuary or dwelling place—all the same in Greek*] *and in three days I will raise it up."*
> *"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple and you're going to raise it up in three days?"*
> *But he spoke of the temple of his body* (John 2:18-21).

It is said that at the crucifixion of Jesus the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Our comprehension of that sign may now be altered.

In the New Jerusalem envisioned in the 21st chapter of Revelation, where the sovereignty of God is finally vindicated in the whole of creation, it is made explicitly clear that there is no temple as such, for the temple is the Lamb.

Paul more than once admonishes the congregation at Corinth to remember that they are the temple of the Lord. And to the Ephesians he writes:

> *So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place for God in the Spirit* (Ephesians 2:18-22).

In certain churchly circles these passages about the bodily temple are read in conjunction with whether you smoke cigarettes or drink or have sex or even eat too much. That's not an entirely fatuous reading, but it misses the bulk of the point. It is about community and has wide political implications with respect to the sovereignty of God and the limits of violence and civil authority.

Sanctuary is not a question of fortress mentality, of thick walls and heavy oak doors that power may lock tight. It is a matter of truth and faithfulness. The deepest meaning of sanctuary is revealed in Jesus' death and resurrection. Even in death Jesus takes his refuge only in faithfulness and truth, revealing both radical nonviolence and the sovereignty of God, and becoming our refuge.

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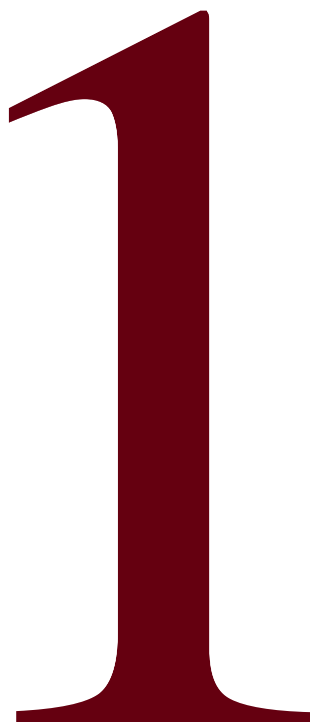
## The Hospitality of God (cont.)



IN THE 1980s there was a growing sanctuary movement in the United States wherein Christians and congregations comprehended politics and the truth of their lives. Christians opened their hearts and church doors to fugitives from Central America.

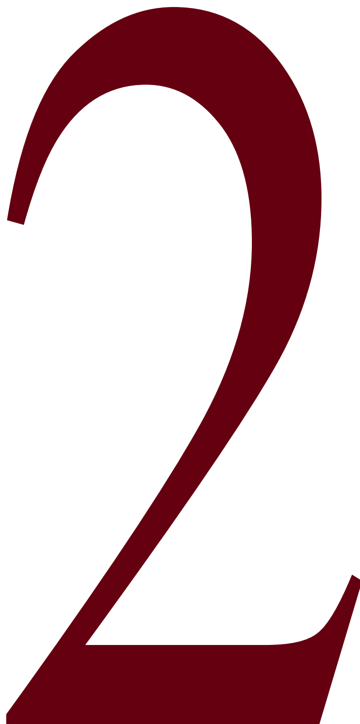
An increasingly organized underground railroad connected places of hospitality for these "illegal aliens," and that network became linked with emerging self-declared sanctuaries. This public disobedience was a risk for the refugees as well as for the congregations—in fact more so. Most were from El Salvador and Guatemala and fled at great risk from the greater risks of disappearance, torture, and political murder. If caught, they faced deportation and likely death in their homelands.

In the sixth chapter of Revelation is an image and a question. The image is of the martyrs, the souls of the faithful dead, crouching under the altar. They seem to be granted sanctuary in death. And they appear to be granted also a clearer view of history from that vantage point.

A question is upon their lips, and it has been suggested that the question is a form of their faith. What they ask is more plaintive than the sweet song of trust composed in Psalm 27, but not surely to be uttered apart from it. They pray: "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and vindicate our blood upon the earth?"

How long indeed? ■

*Bill Wylie-Kellermann was a Methodist pastor living in Detroit, Michigan, and a* Sojourners *contributing editor when this article appeared in the April 1983 issue of* Sojourners.



# SESSION 2

## The Beloved Community

- "No Longer Strangers," by Lois Ann Lorentzen
- "Looking for Welcome," by Helene Slessarev-Jamir
- "The Changing Face of America," by Timothy Tseng and David Yoo
- "The New 'New South,'" by Jorge Mariscal

In one of the world's most religiously and racially diverse nations, the church must be at the forefront of creative ways to be more inclusive. In this session, the authors give suggestions in the areas of church growth, public policy, and race relations on how Christians can move from tolerance of multiculturalism to passion for justice in the midst of diversity.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your faith community engage with multicultural religious traditions in music, prayer, and worship? Have those practices challenged you in your own religious beliefs or expressions?
2. How would you define your race or ethnicity? How has that affected your relationship with other Christians?
3. What are the race and immigrant demographics of your church or community? How does this influence or shape the important social and political issues people are engaged in? Has your church done a demographic survey and compared it to the demographics projections of the city or state? How might you help the church prepare for coming cultural shifts so that people can welcome—rather than fear or resent—the newcomer?
4. How are the broader issues of populations in migration connected to trade policies, environmental degradation, and international conflict? Find examples of new immigrants in the United States who have left their homes because of one of these reasons.

### RESOURCES

• The *Justice for Immigrants* campaign provides tools and information for church- and community-based organizing, education, and advocacy efforts—including 10 myths about immigrants that everyone should address. (www.justiceforimmigrants.org)

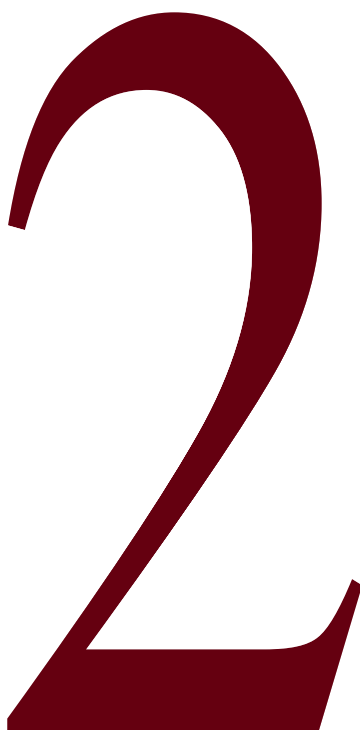
• *The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers' Struggle*, directed by Rick Tejade-Flores and Ray Telles, explores the history of the movement to gain greater rights for migrant agricultural workers, led by nonviolent visionary Cesar Chavez. (Independent Television Service, 1997)

• The Religion and Immigration Project offers research from scholars such as Lois Ann Lorentzen, Rosalina Mira, and Luis Enrique Bazan on faith-based issues in migration and the home and foreign country experiences of immigrants. (www.usfca.edu/TRIP)

• *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, by Diana L. Eck, paints the 21st-century American

religious landscape with the full palette of faiths it includes, and explores how we can all engage in our pluralistic society. (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001)

• *Asian American Religions: The Making and Remaking of Border and Boundaries*, edited by Tony Carnes and Fenggang Yang, looks at the role of Western and Eastern religions in the Asian-American immigrant experience. (New York University Press, 2004)



# NO LONGER STRANGERS

***by Lois Ann Lorentzen***

Walking around my hometown of San Francisco, I am always struck by a remarkable cultural vibrancy that translates into religious dynamism. In Chinatown, the Gold Mountain Monastery serves vegetarian meals daily, Chinese-speaking nuns minister to both longtime residents and recent arrivals, and people escape bustling streets to worship in the peaceful temple. In the Mission District, a predominantly Latino area of the city, St. Peter's Catholic Church houses a refugee center, health services, a homeless shelter, and legal services for immigrants and offers Mass in Spanish. Templo de la Fe, a storefront charismatic church, works with youth trying to leave the gangs that congregate on the streets of the Mission District. Mosques, Hindu temples, Buddhist monasteries, Vietnamese Catholic churches, Santeria stores, Sikh gudwaras, Russian Orthodox spires, and storefront churches all shape the landscape of my town.

According to Harvard religion scholar Diana L. Eck, the United States—which has more American Muslims than Episcopalians—is the most religiously diverse nation in the world. This is mainly due to the largest wave of migration in U.S. history, which is having a profound impact on the ethnic and racial composition of the country. Since the early 1990s, almost a million legal immigrants have entered the United States each year, including perhaps 150,000 undocumented persons. These new migrants are racially, ethnically, and religiously more diverse than earlier groups. In 1960, seven of the top-10 sending countries were European; by 1996, six of the top 10 were Asian, one of them was Mexico, and only one of them was European.

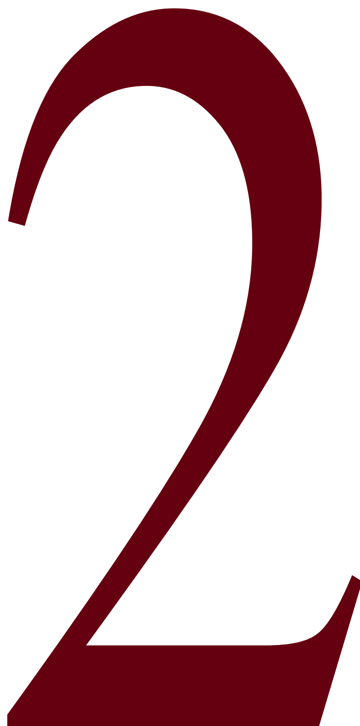
Daly City, California, boasts the largest concentration of Filipinos outside Manila. Long Beach claims more Cambodians than Phnom Penh. Los Angeles has the third largest population of people of Mexican descent (following Mexico City and Guadalajara). Are these "American" cities? Mexican, Filipino, and Cambodian cities? Cosmopolitan world cities? With a population that is 10.4 percent foreign-born, and with more than 30 million immigrants, the United States has a new face.

### The New Hues of U.S. Christianity

The new United States is evident in U.S. Christianity, which includes Latino, Filipino, and Vietnamese Catholics; Chinese, Haitian, and Korean evangelicals; and pentecostals of all ethnicities. Churches must negotiate multiple identities—cultural/ethnic, Christian, American—and this occurs in creative ways. University of Southern Maine sociologist Fenggang Yang writes of the "sinicization of Christianity," referring to the growth of Chinese Protestant churches in which occurs the integration of evangelical beliefs with Chinese (mainly Confucian) values. Chinese Catholic churches frequently incorporate traditional Chinese symbols and practices—such as the venerating of ancestors—into Catholic services. Chinese Catholic New Year's celebrations may include red pockets for small children and offerings of fruit and pigs' heads for ancestors.

Church services in San Francisco, as in most major urban areas, are offered in many languages, including Tagalog, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Korean, Polish, Mandarin, and Cantonese. Days honoring Salvador del Mundo, Guadalupe, the Virgin of Levang, and other national or cultural saints occur in most U.S. cities. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops 2000 letter, "Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity," celebrates these cultural celebrations and devotions from around

## No Longer Strangers (cont.)



the world as "gifts given to the church."

Church historian Timothy Smith has called immigration a "theologizing experience." Migrants bring countless gifts to the church, including new ways of thinking about and practicing our faith. The theology articulated by some migrant groups expresses exile and oppression in terms similar to that of the Exodus of Hebrew scripture. Filipino Catholics at a parish in one of San Francisco's poorest areas note that theirs is a faith that strongly identifies with suffering, and that congregants hold a perspective about poverty that is less "mean-spirited" than the mainstream American view. Perhaps related: In 1995, the Catholic bishops conference of the Philippines wrote "Comfort My People, Comfort Them: A Pastoral Letter on Filipino Migrant Workers," articulating a theology from the perspective of displaced peoples.

One in three U.S. Catholics are Latinos, and the growth of Latino theologies, often influenced by Latin American liberation theologies, continues at an impressive pace. Peter Phan, the first non-Caucasian president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, writes theology influenced by the Vietnamese refugee experience.

### What 'Ethnic' Churches Have to Offer

In official statements, the Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant denominations unequivocally champion the rights of the world's migrants. They also experience an influx of new ethnic groups that they have assisted in resettling. And Christian theology and religious practice in the United States benefit from the varied contributions of newcomers.

But issues of race and difference continue to divide people. Immigrants face a new identity and the experience of being a racial or cultural minority in the United States. They often leave traumatic situations in their homelands only to face discrimination in their new country. In spite of its diversity, the United States remains in many ways what sociologist Robert Bellah terms an "overwhelming monocultural society."

Tension and miscommunication are not uncommon between ethnic minority and Euro-American pastors and parishioners. For example, a 1999 study by the U.S. Catholic bishops' Hispanic Affairs committee found that Latino Catholics—including both immigrants and long-term residents and citizens—remain second-class citizens in most parishes. Latino Catholics were twice as likely to worship in "separate and ...unequal settings," often required to "rent" the church to which they belong.

Given the reality of discrimination and the desire to maintain ethnic identity, it is not surprising that immigrants often prefer ethnic churches to multiethnic or mainstream congregations. Currently there are 3,500 Catholic parishes where Mass is performed in Spanish; 7,000 Latino congregations, most of them pentecostal or evangelical; 2,500 Korean Christian churches; and 1,000 Chinese churches, most of them Protestant. Ethnic churches become focal points for cultural celebrations, ethnic gatherings, and the re-creation of customs—usually in native languages. An ethnic church may provide social belonging, psychological comfort, and religious meaning. In a country often experienced as hostile, an immigrant church provides a buffer against unwelcome aspects of U.S. ways, values, and prejudices while enabling migrants to adapt to others.

And, unlike early mission churches, most of these new churches, with a variety of theological positions, are founded by immigrants themselves. Iglesia ni Cristo, a church founded in the Philippines in 1914, continues to expand dramatically worldwide, following the growth and distribution of the Filipino diaspora. The nondenominational Chinese Christian Church of Greater Washington, D.C., emerged from a

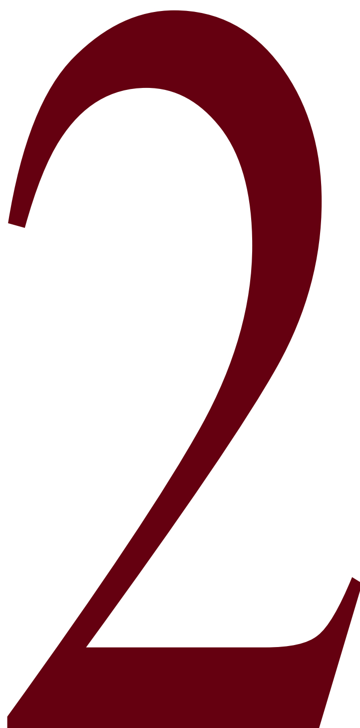
## No Longer Strangers (cont.)

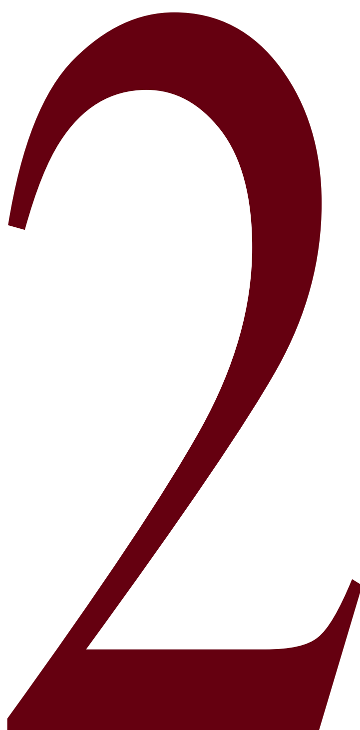
Chinese students' Bible study and remains an important church for Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking migrants. Luz del Mundo was founded in Guadalajara, Mexico, and now boasts congregations wherever there are Mexican migrants.

Many aid and advocacy groups are also immigrant-based. The Central American Refugee Center of San Francisco is one of numerous self-help groups founded by and for immigrants. California's Interfaith Coalition on Immigrant Rights brings together ethnic groups from a wide variety of religious traditions to actively lobby for migrant rights. The Tepeyac Association in New York City is probably one of the nation's most famous immigrant self-help groups. The real action related to immigrant issues often comes not from mainstream denominations but from the growth and vitality of such ethnic churches and organizations.

Will churches of Western industrialized nations embrace the "strangers among us"? In effect Christians have no option but to provide sanctuary for the uprooted, learn from border-crossers, and fight for those who are in new, often unwelcoming homes that seem so far removed from heaven. Enriched by the insights and theologies formed by the experiences of exile and diaspora, migrant Christians possess an incredible dynamism that—together with the native-born—gives hope for a powerful reinvigoration of the American church. ■

*Lois Ann Lorentzen was professor of social ethics at the University of San Francisco and director of the Religion and Immigration Project (www.usfca.edu/TRIP) when this article appeared in the March-April 2003 issue of* Sojourners.





# LOOKING FOR WELCOME

***by Helen Slessarev-Jamir***

In early 2006, immigrant rights supporters had hopes of passing a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill that would strengthen border security while also creating an urgently needed pathway to citizenship for the millions of people without documents who already live in the United States. But in a surprise move, shortly before Christmas, the House of Representatives passed one of the most vicious anti-immigrant bills in more than a decade. If it were enacted into law, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 would make it a federal crime to live in the U.S. illegally, turning the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants into felons overnight. It would also make it a crime for social service agencies or church groups to shield or offer support to undocumented immigrants.

The extreme measures in this bill would have been unthinkable just a short while ago. It speaks to the extent to which immigration has become a political flashpoint for various groups who have come to see it as a major threat to the American status quo. While the immediate targets of this bill are those who cross into the U.S. without visas, Tom Tancredo (R-Colo.), one of the bill's main supporters, has declared that his ultimate goal is a moratorium on all legal immigration and the denying of citizenship to children born to noncitizens.

News of the harsh legislation has heightened anxiety in immigrant communities. According to Brendan Curran, a priest at St. Pius V Catholic Church in the heart of Chicago's Mexican community, "There's so much fear, they won't even call the police or fire department if something is going on next door. If this becomes law, nurses and priests will not be able to do their work."

Faith institutions are often among the few forms of social support for people who have been separated from their families in other countries and shunned by native-born Americans. Churches and other faith communities are already dealing with the day-to-day struggles, especially poverty, faced by many immigrants. Draconian enforcement measures would make life that much harder, even for documented immigrants.

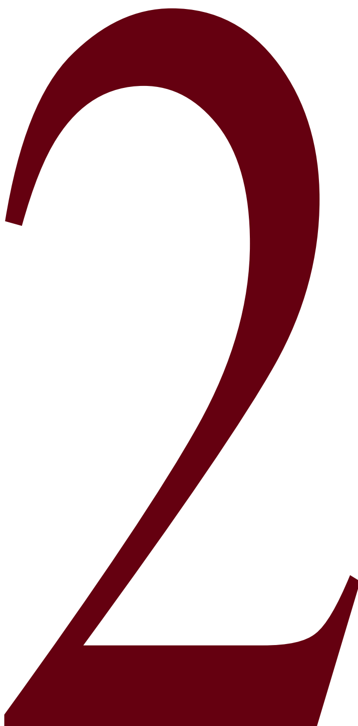
But according to Gabe Gonzales, lead organizer for the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), any new legislation passed by Congress this year is likely to be enforcement only. "There will be massive changes in border enforcement, including building a wall along the Mexican border," said Gonzales. As a result, "the position of the undocumented will get incrementally worse. Harassment away from the border will increase along with increased enforcement of employer sanctions."

Congressional sponsors believe that these punitive measures will force the undocumented to leave. But in reality, most have little to return to and will try to stay, falling deeper into poverty as they are restricted to working in the cash economy.

IMMIGRATION POLICY HAS become so contentious—and so tied to the health of our society—because immigrants and their children now constitute one in every five people living in the U.S. Today Latinos and Asians constitute roughly 75 percent of all immigrants living in the U.S. (of 28.4 million foreign-born residents in the country in 2000, 14.5 million are Latino and 7.2 million are Asian).

The Asian and Latino populations have increased since the 1965 reforms of the nation's immigration laws. These reforms, which resulted from the civil rights movement, brought an end to decades of discriminatory policies that gave preference to

## Looking for Welcome (cont.)



European immigrants while completely excluding Asians from entering the U.S. This transformed the country into a much more profoundly multiethnic society than it had been in the past—changes that are having deep reverberations throughout American society.

The vast majority of immigrants come to the United States in search of a better life, making the difficult choice to leave behind their desperately poor families so that they can work in the U.S. and send money back home. Labor migration from the Southern hemisphere has increased worldwide as the pace of economic globalization disrupts traditional forms of economic activity. For instance, it is estimated that more than 1 million Mexican farmers were left without work as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Many of these immigrants will find work in this country's expanding contingent labor force, where wages and working conditions continue to spiral downward. Jose Oliva, workers' center network coordinator for Interfaith Worker Justice, said that every one of the network's 14 centers has received reports of human trafficking of immigrants within the U.S. In late January, one of the IWJ centers, the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues, held an action outside the Ho Ho Employment Agency in Chicago's Chinatown to call attention to a complaint filed on behalf of Gildardo Ferreira, a Mexican immigrant. The employment agency had sent Ferreira to work in a Chinese buffet restaurant in Michigan where he was housed in an apartment with 30 other workers, all sharing one bathroom, and forced to work 70 hours in five days. Only after an article on the case appeared in the Chicago Tribune did the U.S. Department of Labor finally agree to investigate.

Some immigrants come as refugees or asylum-seekers, fleeing violence and persecution in their homelands. This is far more traumatic than leaving as a willing emigrant. In many cases, members of the family have perished or have been left behind during the flight from their home country, so only a partial family has resettled in the U.S. Recent legislative measures will increase the trauma for many—the Real ID Act of 2005 included new restrictions for asylum-seekers.

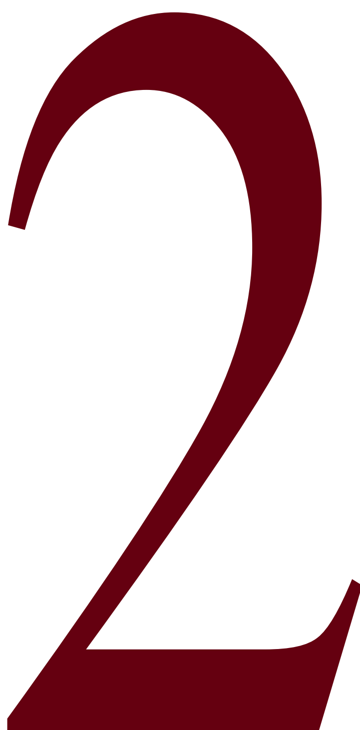
Refugees also struggle economically. Thirty years after they first began to arrive in the U.S., many Southeast Asian refugees are still living in poverty, a sharp contrast to the common stereotypes of successful Asian immigrants. Before welfare reforms cut many of them off, nearly 30 percent of Southeast Asians were on public aid, the highest participation rate of any ethnic group. As of the 2000 census, 42 percent of Cambodian and 35 percent of Hmong refugees in the U.S. still lived in poverty.

U.S. policymakers have generally granted refugee status only to people fleeing countries where the regime was considered to be an enemy of this country, so Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Haitians fleeing U.S.-backed death squads are not recognized as refugees.

BY DEFINITION, NEW immigrants, with or without documents, are excluded from the privileges of citizenship. As a result of the 1996 welfare reforms, they are ineligible for most federal safety net programs. They are the least likely to have health insurance. For many this is temporary. For more and more of those who entered without documents, it is permanent; they truly live in the shadows. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service estimated that, in 2000, 39 percent of all Latino immigrants were in the U.S. illegally. There are also significant numbers of Asian undocumented immigrants, mainly from China, the Philippines, India, and Korea, some as the result of visa overstays, others who entered without documents.

The lives of the undocumented practically define deep poverty in America. These immigrants live in poverty or close to it while doing some of the most grueling work

## Looking for Welcome (cont.)



in the country. As the film *A Day Without a Mexican* drove home so poignantly, Latinos occupy an ever-present, yet virtually invisible, place in many Americans' lives. For many new immigrants, day labor provides a foothold in the U.S. and a chance to gain work experience and skills. A recent national study found that three-quarters of all day laborers are undocumented immigrants. More than half reported having been cheated out of wages, and 73 percent said they had been made to dig ditches, handle dangerous chemicals, work on roofs or scaffolding, or otherwise be exposed to hazardous working conditions.

Tim Bell, who heads up the Chicago Workers' Collaborative, said that day labor drives down the labor standards of all workers in the U.S. because it undercuts workers' ability to organize and creates an underground workforce that suffers abuses of their rights. He said that many big companies are outsourcing to subcontractors who in turn hire day laborers. Bell believes that if Congress creates a guest worker program it will lead to the creation of a massive international temporary workers labor market. "People feel like they're paper cups. When the employer is finished with them, they just get thrown out," said Bell.

The ICIRR's Gonzales believes the only way this will change is if immigrant workers get some protective status so they can do collective bargaining to improve their wages and working conditions.

One of the urgently needed reforms would be to improve the status of children who entered illegally. While they are now permitted to attend public school, they are legally unable to work or receive federal financial aid to attend college. These restrictions contribute to very low high school and college graduation rates among Latinos, with only 52 percent completing high school and only 10 percent finishing college, according to census data. Recently a number of states have granted these children access to in-state tuition. Senators Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) have reintroduced the Dream Act, which seeks to create avenues by which those young adults who have grown up in the U.S. could regularize their status.

Faith communities can be a key presence in positive immigration reform efforts. The Latino presence in the country, for example, is transforming the face of U.S. Christianity and challenging North American Protestant and Catholic churches to become more responsive to those who are living at the margins. Tom Chabolla, associate director for programs at the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, oversees the funding of organizations working in immigrant communities to gain access to health care, employment, and affordable housing. "The Catholic Church stands both at the center and at the margins of society, with immigrants at the margins and members with lots of power at the center," Chabolla said. "The church uses its resources to stand with the immigrants to protect their dignity."

Just as most immigrant faith institutions substitute for the extended families that have been left behind, such congregations also stand at the forefront of the fight for justice for immigrants.

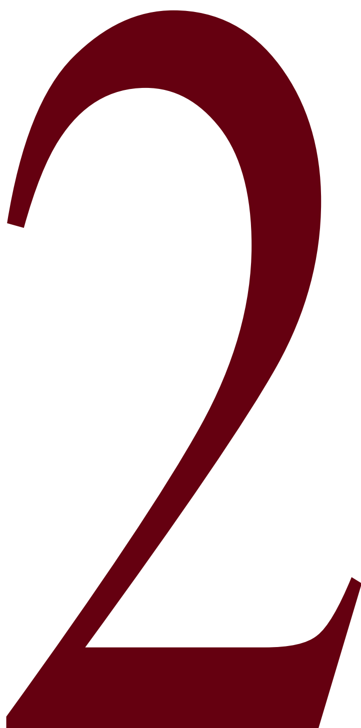
"Right now the key issue for us is what's going on in Congress," said Curran, at Chicago's St. Pius V. "We in the church go back to the fact that we don't have borders in the churches. The kingdom of God has lots of rooms for lots of people who we might not like or agree with, but Jesus invited them in."

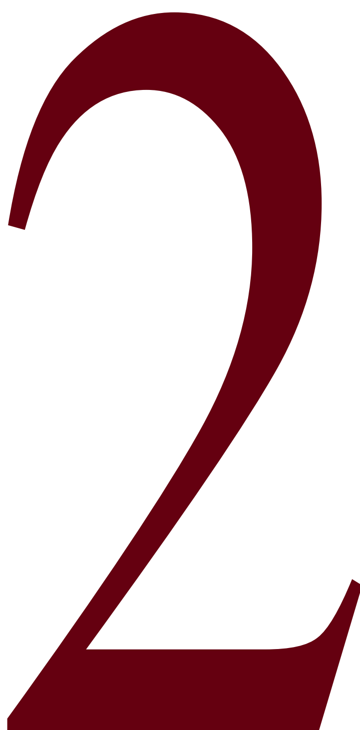
As immigration reform advocates look ahead, they are drawing on the civil rights movement. "The lesson of the civil rights movement is that those who opposed black equality tried to pit whites against blacks," said Gonzales. To win immigration reform that creates viable pathways to citizenship, "we have to reach out to the Anglo churches because that's where the power is and to the African-American churches because we're always getting pitted against each other."

## Looking for Welcome (cont.)

"What is being done in Congress is draconian," said Minerva Carcaño, a United Methodist bishop in Phoenix. "The whole body of Christ—Protestant, Catholic, evangelical, pentecostal—needs to come together to hold up a vision of humanness." ■

*Helene Slessarev-Jamir, a second-generation American whose parents came to the U.S. in the 1950s, was a member of the National Hispanic/Latino Ministry Plan Committee of the United Methodist Church and director of urban studies at Wheaton (Illinois) College when this article appeared in the April 2006 issue of* Sojourners.





# THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICA

*by Timothy Tseng and David Yoo*

New language to describe the complexity of contemporary race relations in America will necessarily wander outside the familiar black-white race relations framework. Multiculturalism is merely one small step toward a new way of talking about race relations today. Some have noted, however, that projecting multiculturalism as the idea vision for America in fact jeopardizes efforts for racial justice.

Multicultural education, for instance, may celebrate America's diversity, but it often ignores the power and persistence of "elite white male privilege." On the other hand, many fear that multiculturalism's pluralist premise fosters racial polarization and identity politics. Thus, it is reassuring to those who are morally committed to racial justice and those who fear the "balkanization" of American society to retain the black-white paradigm. Nevertheless, a new language is needed. The black-white paradigm, helpful as it may be in describing power inequity, no longer—if it ever did—reflects social reality.

## The Data of a New America

Throughout the past 30 years, the influx of immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean has dramatically altered America's racial landscape. Brought up in New York City, Tim observed the explosive growth of its Chinatown and the emergence of three other "Chinatowns" in Queens and Brooklyn during the past three decades. He also witnessed the incredible proliferation of Korean and Chinese churches all over the metropolitan area.

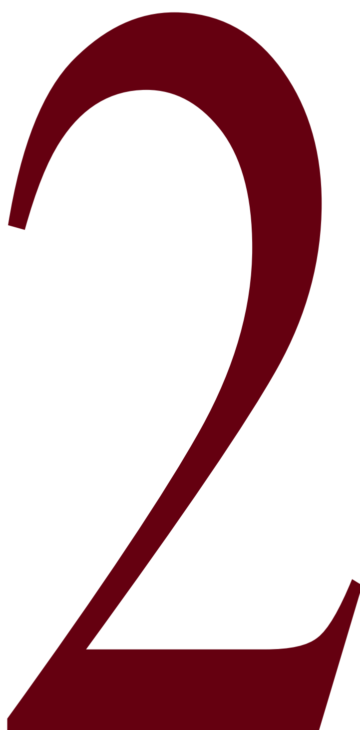
On the other end of the country, David, a native of Southern California, also saw the effects of the 1965 Immigration Act as Latinos and Asians accounted for much of the tremendous population growth in the region. The increasing presence of Latinos not only affected the Roman Catholic churches in metropolitan Los Angeles, but also boosted activity in a wide array of Protestant church contexts. Asian immigrant churches and temples in the past three decades have also altered the religious landscape.

These observations are supported by the demographic shifts of the racial composition of American society toward even greater diversity. By 2018 the non-Latino white population is expected to decline from 75.6 percent to 64.9 percent of the population (in 1995, white people numbered 193.9 million). The African-American population is now more than 33.1 million, while the population of American Indians grew to 2.2 million. But the greatest growth has come from Asian and Latino immigration. Three-and-a-half million Asians resided in the United States in 1980, but now there are more than 9.75 million. The Latino population has exploded from 9.07 million in 1970 to more than 22.75 million today. Latinos will probably outnumber African Americans in the next century, growing from 8.7 percent to 15.4 percent of the population. Asians are projected to grow from 3.3 percent to 6.5 percent of the population.

Most of the growth is taking place in major metropolitan regions such as New York City, Chicago, Miami, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Los Angeles. The concentration of populations in these areas is already having a major impact on local politics and foreshadows the future of American race relations.

Consequently, the larger cities are witnessing the formation of multilingual and religiously diverse communities, which have not been seen since the turn of the cen-

## The Changing Face of America (cont.)



tury. This time, however, the diversity appears to be greater. It appears that the world is, indeed, coming to America.

A closer look at the "new" immigrants reveals quite a different portrait than stereotypical images. A large proportion of immigrants are well-educated professionals, young risk-takers, and not impoverished. Even those who "fit" the stereotypes, such as poor migrant workers from Mexico or refugees from Vietnam, usually embody "American values" of hard work and rugged individualism.

Nevertheless, this portrait can be misused for political purposes. While negative stereotypes of "job-stealing immigrants" and the "welfare mom" are employed regularly to justify immigration restrictions or the dismantling of the welfare state, positive images are also used to undermine policies designed to rectify ongoing racial discrimination (such as affirmative action) and undercut the moral sway of the call for racial justice. Asian-American educational and economic "success" stories, for instance, are often used to exhort others to "stop whining!" The burden of proof has shifted from white racism to non-white "cultures of victimization." Thus, jeremiads for justice have been reduced to nagging complaints.

### The Illusion of Race

While the perceived success and pariah status attributed to various immigrants has been used to alter the character of American politics vis-à-vis race relations, another development may also change our concepts of race. The growing acceptance and rate of interracial or interethnic marriages portends a very different kind of understanding of race relations in the future (for example, 60 percent of third-generation Japanese-American *sansei* marry outside of their ethnicity or race). While it is likely that racial and ethnic organizations will persist, children of intermarriages will challenge rigid concepts of race and ethnicity.

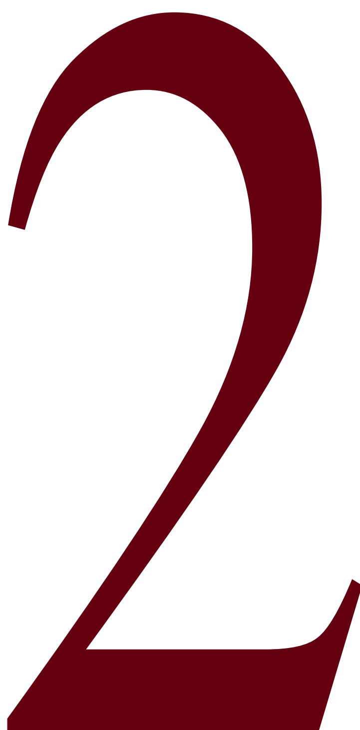
Additionally, scholars of race are concluding that racial identity is much more "plastic" than previously imagined. It is a socially constructed and politically determined means of marking differences and creating inequality that has little basis in biology, culture, or behavior traits. Thus, to link intelligence to one's skin color will now draw the ire of many scholars who would debunk that way of thinking as "essentialist." After all, the differences within racial groups are larger than those between them.

At first glance, this doesn't appear very provocative. It simply repeats the traditional liberal critique of early 20th-century white supremacy (which attempted to demonstrate that the white race was innately superior to others). If there are no "colored" races—only the one human race—then the ideology of white supremacy would have no basis in reality.

The plasticity of our cultural identities and the recognition that no real basis for racial distinctions and consciousness exists raises a number of questions: Should not our public policies therefore be colorblind? Should we not strive to be rid of ethnic churches in favor of integrated ones? Would not Afrocentric education and Korean congregations be expressions of race consciousness that may lead to reverse discrimination? Given the changing face of America, it is understandable why many advocate the elimination of race consciousness altogether. Broadening the black-white paradigm to include other race conscious groups sounds like a prescription for social chaos.

But there are limitations to this updated version of the 19th-century abolitionist call for "one bloodism." It cannot adequately address the consequences of ongoing racial discrimination even if racial distinctions do not exist biologically. It cannot compensate for the years of Euro-American accrual of privilege and power at the

## The Changing Face of America (cont.)



expense of "Third World" people. It ignores the fact that our skin color, despite the declining legitimacy of race, still determines our social location and the way we treat each another. Racial distinctions may be nothing more than sociopolitical constructs, but they are not harmless illusions.

### The Persistence of Race

Because it is a powerful illusion that shapes the quality of life of all Americans, race remains a significant factor in our society. Some believe that the passage of the 1965 Civil Rights Act, which ended legal segregation, marked the beginning of the end of racial discrimination. But its persistence can be seen in recent incidents of violence directed at Asians and African Americans, racial discrimination in corporations, and in the growth of white supremacist groups.

Equally persistent, however, is the belief that these incidents are aberrations in a normally non-racist society. Denials and denunciations by different people when presented with the notion that America is racist are an indication of the great divide or confusion over the persistence of racial discrimination today. The confusion lies in the conscious or subconscious desire to reduce American racism to an epiphenomenon or a dependent social variable. The following examples illustrate this point:

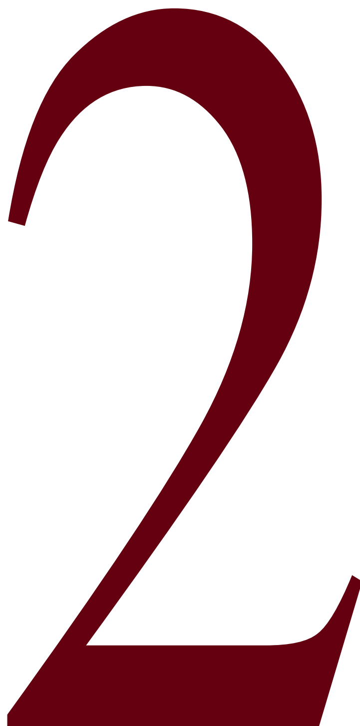
1. Psychological reductionism, which is the belief that racism is a set of individual attitudes. But overt expressions of prejudice do not account for the structural racial inequities woven into the fabric of society.

2. Ethnic reductionism, which confuses race and ethnicity. Ethnicity refers to one's national origins and cultural roots, while race is defined politically and based on skin pigmentation. Sociologists who ignore the race factor tend to place all people in the ethnicity paradigm, thus presupposing the gradual structural assimilation of immigrants and non-whites into American society over time. However, the facts do not square with this grand vision. "Racial minorities," unlike the European immigrants of a century ago, do not easily integrate into mainstream America. This is most clear among African Americans, but it is also true of Latino and Asian immigrants. The basic flaw in ethnic reductionism is the use of the European immigrant experience of assimilation as the model for other groups.

3. Economic reductionism, which suggests that economic injustices trump racial injustices. Many argue that talking about racial justice is divisive, while working for economic justice brings unity. In fact, some would substitute class-based for race-based policies because they appear to be colorblind and thus more fair. Economic reductionism is one of the major reasons why Asian Americans are often not considered a group that faces racial discrimination. Asian-American educational and economic attainment are almost always presented so favorably (though not accurately) that Asian Americans tend to drop out of the picture in studies linking the degree of racial discrimination to economic achievement alone. But this ignores the fact that even wealthy and educated people of color are discriminated against.

If race were really a harmless illusion, then it could be reduced to prejudice, ethnicity, or poverty. But if it is viewed as a significant factor in America, then one can conclude that race is at the core of American society. Historians and sociologists are increasingly coming to this painful conclusion. The problem—past and present—lies in recognizing the persistence and pervasiveness of "white" identity, power, and privilege in America. To insist that American society is colorblind is to ignore how

## The Changing Face of America (cont.)



"whiteness" defines what is considered "normal" and "aesthetically pleasing" in our culture.

### The Need for Identity Politics

An old Chinese proverb is applicable here: "If you want to know what it's like to be a fish, don't ask the fish." So immersed are we in a society shaped by "white" definitions of reality that few are even conscious of it. Sometimes it seems that being "white" in America means being racially neutral. But this is clearly false.

Historians such as David Rodeiger have noted that "whiteness" itself is a sociopolitical construct in which people from diverse European backgrounds were assimilated into an identity that conferred privilege and segregated their poor members from non-whites. Because "whiteness" became so firmly rooted in the American subconscious, even many well-intentioned Euro-American civil rights activists could not see that their visions of an integrated society meant conformity to these "norms."

Black nationalism and other race-conscious movements can therefore be seen as a reaction to the pervasiveness of "whiteness" in society. In its most apocalyptic expressions, identity politics can advocate for permanent segregation (for example, white militia groups and some black separatists share this conviction). But for others it is viewed as the most practical means of finding a place and a voice at the American table. In the future, perhaps, when race is no longer a factor in creating social inequality, the politics of identity will be put to rest. But not now, not yet.

It seems that things used to be so simple. Racial discrimination was easy to detect. The remedy was also simple (though very difficult to act upon) as Christians harkened back to the abolitionist cry of "one blood!" "Integrate, don't segregate" became public policy and the touchstone of Protestant activism. But that was 30 years ago.

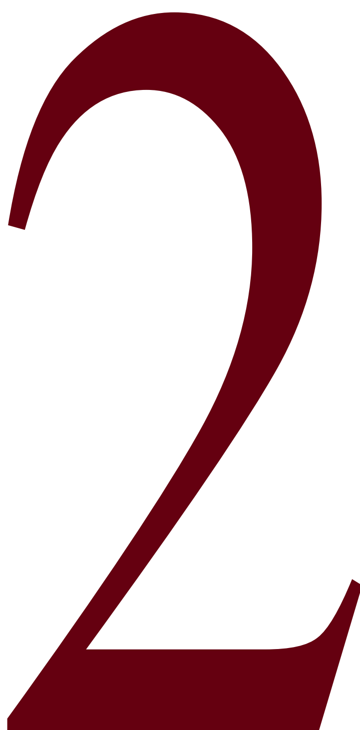
Today, segregation abounds. Christians committed to racial justice should resist the temptation to gloss over the differences and inequalities caused by a fallen world and society. At the same time, the Pauline vision of a new creation where our particularities are embraced beneath the canopy of "the beloved community" should remain our great hope. How can Christians walk the fine line between the two?

First, recognize and name "white" privilege and power over all of us. It separates "white" people from their non-white brothers and sisters. It creates in many people of color a revulsion for people who look like themselves. Ultimately, it is an idolatry that confers benefits to only a select group in our society.

Second, reject extreme forms of identity politics. Let us keep our eyes on the prize—the beloved community. Our racial identities do not define us completely, for we are named after the One who has redeemed *all* humanity.

Third, support and take part in ministries that stress racial partnership while respecting the presence of "ethnically based" groups. Eleven o'clock on Sundays may be America's most segregated hour, but instead of passively decrying this reality, work so that the flock scattered on Sunday will be ready on Monday to be partners in mission. ■

*Timothy Tseng was Sallie Knowles Crozer assistant professor of American Religious History at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School in Rochester, New York, and David Yoo was a professor of history at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California, when this article appeared in the March-April 1998 issue of* Sojourners.



# THE NEW 'NEW SOUTH'

*by Jorge Mariscal*

In the land of Jim Crow and the civil rights movement's most dramatic struggles, a black-white universe of race relations is slowly giving way to a more complex terrain that will determine all future U.S. cultural and political projects. Throughout the Deep South, or what Strom Thurmond used to call the Old Confederacy, immigrants from Latin America are changing the face of large urban centers, small towns, and rural settings.

The increase in Latinos between 1990 and 2000 in North Carolina was 393.9 percent, in Arkansas 337 percent, in Georgia 299.6 percent, and in Tennessee 278.2 percent. In Mississippi, the number of Latinos more than doubled during the 1990s. And these numbers are probably too low given the Census Bureau's track record of undercounting Latinos.

Demographic transformations in the Southern states are the most dramatic. But large communities of indigenous people from Latin America also can be found in Brooklyn, Hartford, Chicago, and Boston. In the region traditionally associated with ethnic Mexican people—the Southwest—the "latinoization" of the cultural landscape continues its natural course.

In some urban spaces, Southeast Asians, Central Americans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans live side by side with other working-class families. Recently, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington gave an Ivy League imprimatur to a resurgent nativist backlash by singling out Latinos as "the most significant threat to American culture." According to the 2000 census, more legal immigrants arrived in the United States in the 1990s than in any previous decade in U.S. history. The economic boom of the Clinton years attracted large numbers of people from around the world. The majority of these legal immigrants came from Latin America (approximately 51 percent, with 26 percent from Asian countries).

Given the stunning demographic changes, the electoral landscape is slowly shifting, but it will be some time before we can fully understand the consequences. Many Latinos, especially first-generation immigrants, do not vote and have yet to fully experience the effects of long-standing institutional racism in education, employment, and housing. Many of the children of these new arrivals will beat the odds and become successful, but many more will be tracked into the service sector, the lowest ranks of the military, or prison.

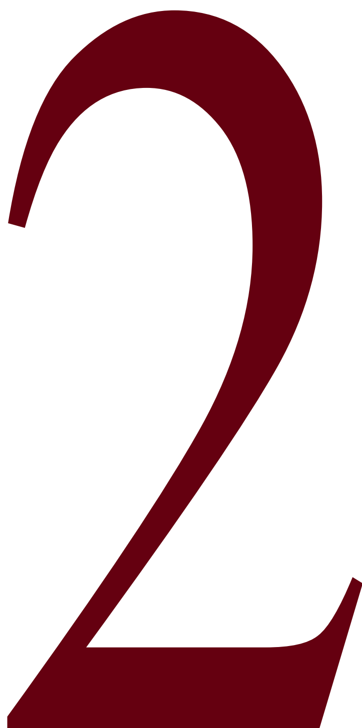
A SERIES OF recent lawsuits suggests that in those communities where the influx of new immigrants has been highest, law enforcement agencies have increased their use of racial profiling. Tensions between white youth and youth of color are on the rise in areas such as San Diego and Riverside counties in California, where "White Power" groups recruit from among disgruntled working-class youth. Last September, white students at Elsinore High School in Riverside County confronted Latino students with racial insults and flags bearing iron crosses and swastikas. By the end of the school year, administrators at several other schools were grappling with similar incidents. In many areas, the Latino population continues to grow as white numbers decrease. These changes—coupled with structural racism, shrinking state budgets, and a Pentagon-driven economy that strips away the social safety net—bode ill for the future.

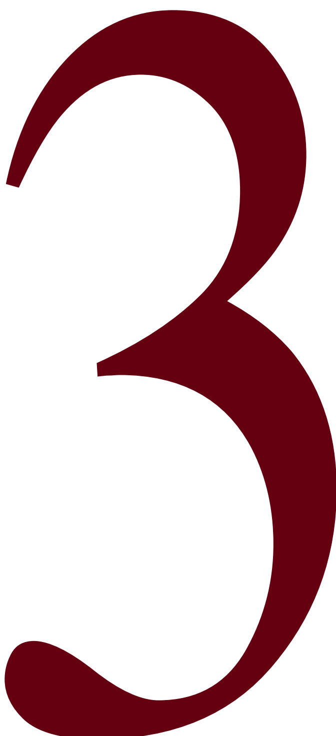
And yet, as in previous periods of rapid change, the conditions for progressive social movements are gradually taking shape. The struggle for economic justice,

## The New 'New South' (cont.)

racial equality, and international peace and cooperation will be led by young people who can imagine a better world than the one they have inherited. Perhaps at this very moment, somewhere in a schoolhouse in Georgia or Michigan or Illinois, the next César Chávez or Dolores Huerta is preparing for that struggle. ■

*Jorge Mariscal was director of the Chicano/a-Latino/a Arts and Humanities Program at the University of California, San Diego, when this article appeared in the August 2004 issue of* Sojourners.





## SESSION 3

# At the Dividing Wall

- "Men With Guns," by James Reel
- "Prisoners With No Crime," by Peter A. Geniesse
- "Finding Refuge in God's New Earth," by Bob Ekblad
- "Straddling the Border," by Elizabeth Palmberg

Our borders are less safe, James Reel reveals, as vigilante groups—most armed, some with ties to white supremacists—have begun to walk the line between the U.S. and Mexico. Less than 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States has plans to build a 700-mile-long wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. Additionally, our sense of justice is diminished by the often-lengthy detention of immigrants who come to the U.S. seeking freedom. Bob Ekblad and Elizabeth Palmberg give examples of two organizations—New Earth and BorderLinks—promoting awareness, reflection, and relationship with migrants on the border and in communities around the country.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did your ancestors arrive in this country? How does that shape your current place in society?

2. Many Mexican-American families never crossed the border; instead, it crossed them when the U.S. annexed California, Nevada, Utah, Texas, and vast swaths of other territory after the Mexican-American War. If you were a member of such a family, how would you respond to border militias' ideas about what it means to be American?

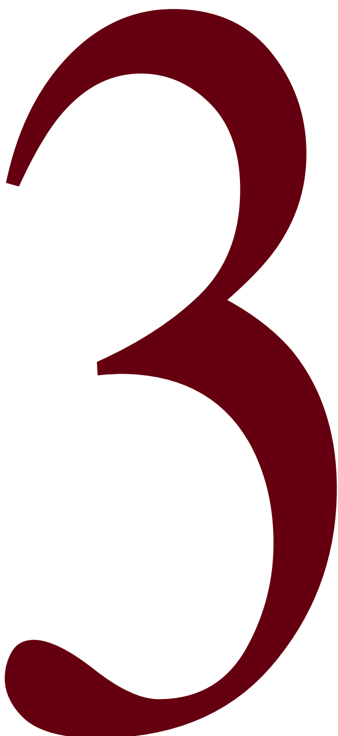
3. Since the U.S. Border Patrol began patrolling high-population areas more aggressively a few years ago, migrants have been forced to attempt more dangerous desert crossings; dozens die of exposure every year. Why do you think migrants risk death and endure separation from their families?

## RESOURCES

• *Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey* is a clear-eyed look at the perils Mexicans face when they cross the U.S.-Mexico border. In this 33-minute DVD, theologians, church leaders, activists, and migrants talk about why they leave their homes and risk everything—including their lives—to come to the United States for work and for a dignified life. Order it from the Center for Latino Spirituality and Culture at the University of Notre Dame. (www.nd.edu/~latino/units/dying_video.htm)

• *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit*, by Father Daniel Groody, is a firsthand narrative of his ministry to migrants and his encounters with border officials, smugglers—called coyotes—and the migrants themselves. (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002)

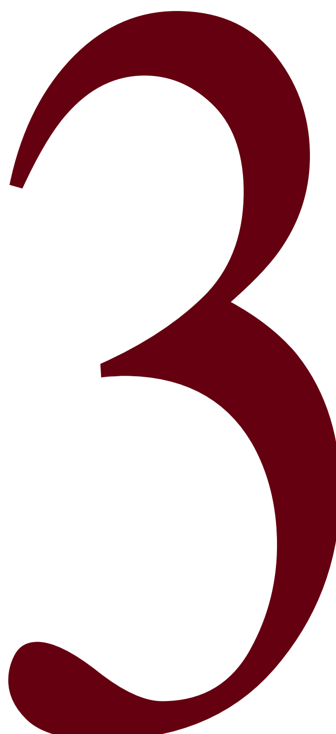
• Tierra Nueva (New Earth), a Burlington, Wash.-based organization, offers services to migrant families and, through The People's Seminary, opportunities for reflection and worship. (www.peoplesseminary.org)



• BorderLinks leads delegations to learn about life on the U.S.-Mexico border. Participants stay with Mexican families and learn about border history, economics, and theology. (www.borderlinks.org)

• The Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC) provides a full range of legal and other support services to 160-plus member agencies that serve poor immigrants seeking family reunification, citizenship, and protection from persecution and violence. (www.cliniclegal.org)

• *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* by Sonia Nazario is the firsthand account of a 17-year-old's trip from Honduras to the United States, which he enters illegally. (Random House, 2006)



# MEN WITH GUNS

***by James Reel***

In the southeastern corner of Arizona, Cochise County rides the Mexican border. And there's a burr under its saddle. Armed civilian groups are patrolling the international boundary, scouting the rolling grasslands and rough hills for people who have entered the United States illegally, and in many cases detaining them until the U.S. Border Patrol arrives to take them into custody. The leaders of these militias say they are compensating for inadequate government enforcement of misguided immigration policies that allow undocumented workers, drug smugglers, and possibly terrorists to "swarm" across the border, damaging private property, harming the environment, and intimidating rural residents.

Human-rights organizations charge that these militias terrorize people they assume to be undocumented immigrants, violate state laws limiting militia activities and civilian arrests, escalate the potential for violence, and maintain links to racist hate groups.

"People were already being harassed by the Border Patrol, and now things have gotten even worse," says Jennifer Allen of the Tucson-based Border Action Network. Mexican Americans born and raised in the United States, she says, "used to go out hunting or hiking, but they've been dragged out of their tents and harassed to such a degree that they don't go out of the city anymore. And now these vigilantes are out there with the attitude that if you're brown and out in the desert, you must be an undocumented migrant. So even the residents are in danger because the vigilante groups are bringing people in that are racist and hunting for anyone with brown skin."

Border Action Network asserts that some militia members have openly consorted with out-of-state representatives of racist groups. One public meeting in May 2000 was attended not only by such local militia backers as Roger Barnett and Glenn Spencer, but also by two representatives from David Duke's National Organization for European American Rights and members of an Arkansas Klan group.

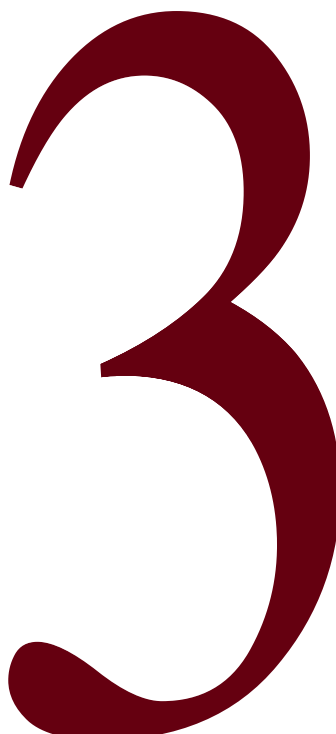
QUESTIONS OF RACISM aside, militia members are reacting to, and contributing to, an already dangerous situation. In the past couple of years, smugglers have become increasingly desperate, aggressive, and in many cases violent. Groups of illegal immigrants have been fired upon—and people killed—by drive-by assailants who have never been apprehended. Law-enforcement agencies theorize that the killers are rival smugglers, while human-rights activists speculate that the attackers could be U.S. vigilantes.

John Fife, pastor-emeritus of Tucson's Southside Presbyterian Church and a leader of the sanctuary movement in the 1980s, has decried the killings, no matter who is responsible for them, as "the culmination of a history of dehumanization and racism and militarism on this border that has gone on for a long time. Too long." Such faith-based groups as Humane Borders and Samaritan Patrol have given humanitarian aid to border crossers in trouble, but they are ill-equipped to contend with such violence—and the potential for more.

Border Action Network, while acknowledging that the border situation has become dangerous and untenable for crossers and residents alike, has been calling, with limited success, for state and federal authorities to take the militias out of play.

Much of the militia activity is centered in Cochise County, which by frontier standards is relatively populous. Here, private ranches cover hundreds of acres crisscrossed by roads. There's more private land along the border in the other Western

## Men With Guns (cont.)



states, but most of the organized militia operations so far have taken place in southeastern Arizona. The major exception is Ranch Rescue, based in Texas with chapters in New Mexico, Arizona, and California. According to its spokesperson Jack Foote, Ranch Rescue has deployed about 200 volunteers in a variety of "operations" over the past two and a half years.

Two other high-profile militias operate exclusively in Arizona. Tombstone-based Civil Homeland Defense was formed by small-newspaper publisher Chris Simcox to counter "the threat of terrorism and out-of-control border crime" by tracking and reporting suspicious groups in the desert. (Although Mexican police in March 2003 arrested two Iraqis and an American of Iraqi descent planning to enter the United States from a Tijuana bus terminal, there is no clear evidence that terrorists have penetrated this country via Mexico.) Simcox estimates that 170 people volunteered for Civil Homeland Defense during the first four months of this year.

UNLIKE THE TWO other groups, the Sierra Vista-based American Border Patrol does not detain undocumented immigrants, according to founder Glenn Spencer; instead, it uses high-tech equipment to post images of undocumented crossers on its Web site.

Texas rancher Jack Foote founded Ranch Rescue in June 2000, inspired in part by the exploits of Cochise County rancher Roger Barnett, who patrols his 22,000-acre Cross Rail Ranch with his brothers, his dog, and his Colt .45 and M-16, forcibly detaining people he suspects to be undocumented immigrants and turning them in to the Border Patrol.

"I've ridden along with Roger on his ranch," says Foote. "These criminal trespassers—that's what they are, criminals—have torn up his infrastructure for his cattle ranch, they've torn down his fences, broken his water pumps, killed his cattle, and trashed his grazing areas."

While not disputing the damage done by large groups of people walking cross-country, Border Action Network notes that much of the land on which ranchers operate is actually state trust land, and the very narrow definition of "trespassing" in the statute covering such property does not include people simply walking there.

Foote says he formed Ranch Rescue to provide a volunteer force for repairing damaged property—and, when invited, to make sure private property remains private. "What we do is stand alongside those border landowners as their invited guests on their private property, and, shoulder to shoulder, we look at our federal and state officials and say, 'Either *you* will keep these criminals off this private property, or *we* will.'"

Jennifer Allen of Border Action Network disputes the extent to which the locals welcome Ranch Rescue. "Folks who live here feel they're being misrepresented by these very few but outspoken vigilantes," she insists. "People are afraid of the repercussions of speaking out against them, but they are very concerned about the vigilante groups."

Foote acknowledges that Ranch Rescue volunteers carry firearms with the permission of the landowner. Volunteers are required to dress in khaki clothing, and many of them wear patches commemorating the "operations" in which they've participated. This gives them a quasi-military look, and Border Action Network has called upon the Arizona attorney general to investigate Ranch Rescue and other groups for impersonating law enforcement or military officers.

That isn't the only charge the group has leveled against the militias. In April, Border Action Network delivered to the attorney general a petition signed by nearly 2,000 border residents calling for an end to vigilante activity. Among the group's recommendations:

## Men With Guns (cont.)

3

Investigate the groups for violations of Arizona's anti-militia statute. The state prohibits individuals, partnerships, and corporations from maintaining "troops under arms," except for businesses hiring armed guards.

Investigate possible violations of Arizona's civilian arrest statute.

Investigate possible violations of state land permits, since the ranches on which the militia groups operate are largely leased state-trust land and the militias would therefore need either a state recreation permit or a permit from the Arizona State Land Department to work there.

Investigate a possible violation of state charities laws by American Border Patrol, which sent out a fund-raising letter after gaining tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service but before registering with the Arizona Secretary of State.

Appoint a special investigator and prosecutor to focus on possible civil and criminal complaints against border vigilante groups.

Activists charge that some law-enforcement agencies are complicit in the militias' activities. According to the Border Action Network's "Hate or Heroism" report, "Ranch Rescue says its members include former Border Patrol agents, military personnel, law enforcement officers, and members of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. This may explain why Ranch Rescue operates with impunity."

Isabel Garcia, of the Human Rights Coalition, says, "What's really disturbing to us is the complicity of Larry Dever, the Cochise County sheriff. He's been a featured speaker at every one of these racist meetings they've had. He's done nothing to stem their violations, and we're not convinced that there may not be some involvement by the U.S. Border Patrol. The former Tucson sector chief, Ron Sanders, and a former California-based sector chief, Bill King, have been to American Border Patrol meetings. Ron Sanders still has folks within the ranks that are very loyal to him." Frank Amarillas, a spokesperson for the U.S. Border Patrol in Tucson, says there is no connection between his agency and American Border Patrol.

Garcia's charge of racism rankles the militia organizers, but the rhetoric of Foote and particularly Spencer could hardly be called sensitive. "The United States and Mexico are two entirely different nations," Spencer declares. "The United States has as its founders people who came here for intellectual reasons, freedom of religion. Mexico was founded by a group of people who came to plunder, the conquistadors.... We have a clash of civilizations: the pilgrims versus the conquistadors, the civilization based on Newton's *Principia Mathematica* and the great philosophers of Europe versus the blood-and-sand character of Mexico, which is based on Aztec warriors and the conquistadors. We are asked to absorb millions of people from this culture; we are unable to assimilate them, so they are asking for their culture to be maintained here in ours. This is a direct threat to the Age of Reason, to the ascent of man, and will end in a massive conflict. It has to be stopped."

The message of such language is clear to University of Arizona professor Edward J. Williams. "I think the main motivation for the most contemporary manifestation of these vigilante groups is racism," he says, "allowing for the fact that there is a strain of legitimate concern based on the trashing of the property of the ranchers and some small degree of burglaries and robberies. But that's not the major issue, certainly not with these more recent groups."

The Border Action Network report acknowledges that Simcox's Civil Homeland Defense "does not appear to be associated with national anti-immigrant or white supremacist groups," but also notes that "Simcox denies that he is racist, but in the same breath likens immigrants to a throng of insects," and the report finds links between racist organizations and Ranch Rescue and especially American Border Patrol.

"The American Border Patrol's Glenn Spencer, for example, can be traced to the

## Men With Guns (cont.)

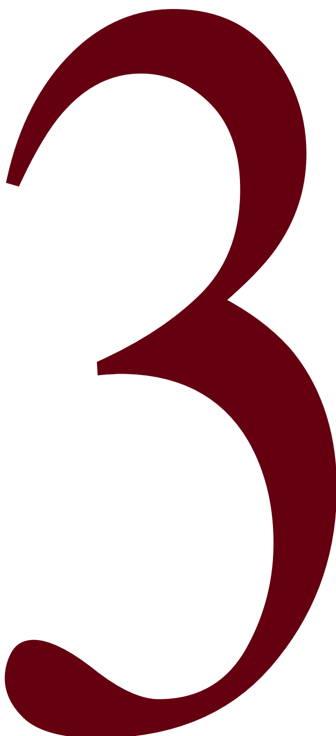
Council of Conservative Citizens and to neo-Nazi organizations such as the National Alliance," the report states.

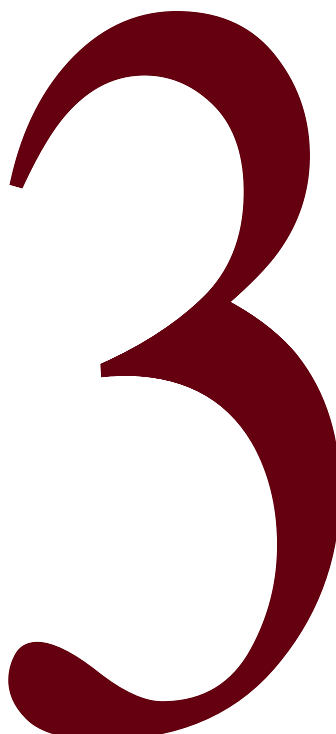
"Glenn Spencer founded a white-nationalist, anti-immigrant organization in California in 1992 with the help of a hefty grant from John Tanton's funding organization, US Inc.," the report says. "Spencer's nonprofit, American Patrol/ Voices of Citizens Together, which agitated for English-only legislation, supported Proposition 187 in California, and broadcasts virulent anti-Mexican/ anti-immigrant messages on the radio and the Web, is listed as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center."

Perhaps the local attitude was best expressed by a Forest Service worker patrolling for fires and other "unusual activity" near the border one wet morning in February. He spends his workdays, in part, contending with the environmental damage done by large groups tramping through the wilderness, then he goes home to live among neighbors who volunteer for militia work.

"I can appreciate some of the problems the ranchers and those people are having," he said. "But those guys running around out there with guns are scary. Real scary." ■

*James Reel was a freelance writer living in Tucson, Arizona, when this article appeared in the July-August 2003 issue of* Sojourners.





# PRISONERS WITH NO CRIME

**by Peter A. Geniesse**

Thousands and thousands of global South refugees are languishing behind bars in the land of the free. They're not criminals. They're "detainees," impoverished and desperate people who entered the United States without the proper credentials. Most have been held for months; some for years. Many are seeking asylum from political persecution in their countries; some now just want to go home. All have to wait until U.S. immigration authorities determine their fate.

Some, however, have had their sentences shortened, thanks to the Catholic Legal Immigration Network and its team of attorneys who know their way around the detention centers, federal courtrooms, and what was formerly the INS bureaucracy.

CLINIC can point with pride to scores of success stories. In the past year the agency interceded on behalf of immigrants from Somalia to Lebanon, from Iraq to Haiti, Brazil, and beyond.

Take the case of two young Haitian men who fled to Florida in a rickety boat to escape political persecution. One had been imprisoned and beaten severely for speaking out against abuses by President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's government. The other had witnessed the assassination of an uncle, who was an opposition leader. CLINIC lawyers presented their appeals for asylum and the two were freed after four months of detention.

"We've had a lot of success," said Kathleen Sullivan, CLINIC's director of detention projects in Boston. It demonstrates that justice is served "when people who are indigent have competent, hardworking representation."

UNFORTUNATELY, most detainees don't have access to such counsel. And both their numbers and their lag time in jail are soaring. The 1996 Immigration Act nearly tripled the number of non-citizens in INS custody. In July 2000, the INS was detaining nearly 20,000 people. National security concerns after 9-11 further restricted immigrant freedom and increased the number of detainees.

"There really is a difference of opinion whether a widespread crackdown on immigrant communities makes us safer," Sullivan said. "There are experts who say it doesn't, and we come down largely on that side."

The latest figures from the Department of Homeland Security, the federal agency that now oversees immigration matters, indicate that 272,625 people applied for asylum in the United States in fiscal 2003. In the same period, the government sent 134,730 people packing. This is not just a matter of deportation, as ominous as that is to one who fled a murderous regime. It's long, long days in crowded prisons and jails, separated from spouses and children. It's being sentenced to indefinite terms for committing no crime.

Today there are more than 500 holding pens for illegal aliens spread across the United States. They range from major federal detention centers such as Krome in Florida to state prisons and even county jails. The federal government pays as much as $75 a day to house each immigration detainee. Some, most notably Cuban *Marielitos* who came in the 1980 Freedom Flotilla, have been jailed for two decades.

"Detention is a particularly unjust and unnecessary response to thousands of non-citizens in INS custody," said Donald Kerwin, CLINIC's executive director in Washington, D.C. Kerwin heads a legal support staff of 63 persons for a growing network of Catholic immigration programs. CLINIC was formed in 1988 and grew out

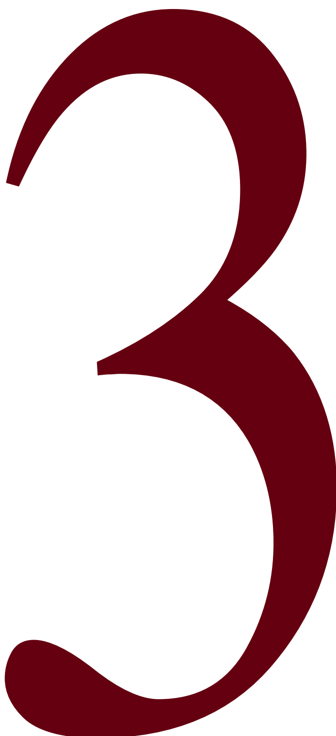
## Prisoners With No Crime (cont.)

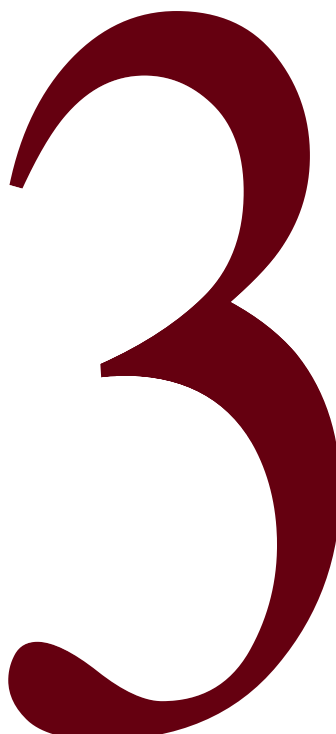
of a project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in the 1960s. It now serves 131 member agencies, which in turn represent more than 100,000 low-income immigrants each year.

The network focuses on the most vulnerable, such as INS detainees, refugees, asylum-seekers, families in need of reunification, and victims of trafficking and domestic violence. For the past seven years, CLINIC especially has been on “detention watch.”

“As the population of administrative detainees continues to increase, the United States must decide whether it can afford—economically and morally—to lock up persons who readily could be reunited with families and become productive members of society,” Kerwin said. “For too long, the INS detention system has dishonored our heritage as a nation of immigrants.” ■

*Peter A. Geniesse, a former newspaper editor, was a freelance writer from Neenah, Wisconsin, when this article appeared in the November-December 2003 issue of* Sojourners.





# FINDING REFUGE IN GOD'S NEW EARTH

***by Bob Ekblad***

My wife, Gracie, and I live with our three children on 35 acres of land near the mouth of the North Fork of the Skagit River, an hour north of Seattle. This is home to New Earth Refuge—a family-based hospitality and retreat center tied to an ecumenical ministry among Latino immigrants in a nearby town. Here we actively seek a sustainable life of solidarity with both people and nature under assault.

Our journey to this land and ministry has been long and perilous, but also rich and rewarding. In 1980-1981 we took a trip to Central America that was both an awakening to the beauty and dignity of the poor and a jarring introduction to the dark side of U.S. imperialism. While studying Spanish in Guatemala, Gracie and I learned from our Guatemalan teachers about the numerous violent U.S. interventions against democratic movements throughout Latin America. We witnessed the terror of a civil war that claimed thousands of lives among Guatemala's indigenous peoples. We felt called to somehow address the root causes of poverty, and found support from a Christian community in Oregon to work among peasants in Honduras.

We partnered with Jose Elias Sanchez, a Honduran development maverick, who insisted that if we wanted to combat poverty at its roots we had to teach farming. He recruited a sage Honduran campesino, Fernando Andrade, to help us establish an experimental farm and training center. Our goal was to teach sustainable farming and preventive health care to help rural people stay on their land and avoid the migration from country to city to North America. Courses happened under mango trees in what we called the Universidad del Campo (University of the Countryside). We founded Tierra Nueva (New Earth) with longtime activists Larry and Joni Geer-Sell and a cadre of campesino promoters, who continue to provide technical and pastoral support to small farmers.

The university's "coursework" consisted of practical alternatives to "slash and burn" that included composting, mulching, and planting green manure crops instead of burning; as well as digging contoured ditches, building soil-conserving barriers, and planting to the contour instead of farming steep land unprotected from tropical downpours. We organized women's groups, trained health workers, and launched campaigns to teach intensive vegetable gardening, hygiene, nutrition, and herbal medicine.

Together we witnessed God's creating "a new heaven and a new earth" (Isaiah 65) during a time when the United States was building military bases, pressuring countries to recruit the region's youth into the armed forces, conducting endless military maneuvers, and launching wars against the people of El Salvador and Nicaragua. We learned to read for the good news in the Bible with people who often felt at the receiving end of God's big stick. We learned to confront negative images of God by asking questions that helped people identify a liberating God at the heart of both the biblical stories and their broken lives. Eventually we came to feel that we could best serve people as pastoral agents, but we needed more training.

In 1989, we left Honduras and spent the next five years studying theology, raising our children, and making regular trips to Honduras. Our own conversion "from below" in Honduras convinced us that mainstream churches and theological academies need direct contact with marginalized people and nature for their spiritual health

## Finding Refuge in God's New Earth (cont.)

3

and survival. We were also convinced of the need for quality theological training to be offered to people at the margins. In 1994 we launched Tierra Nueva del Norte (New Earth of the North) in Burlington, Washington—an ecumenical ministry among migrant farm workers and other Latino immigrants.

Burlington is in the heart of the Skagit Valley, a fertile agricultural valley that winds down from the North Cascades and is drained by the scenic Skagit River. Like many farming communities near cities, Skagit farmland is under assault. In Burlington, acres of prime farmland have been paved over to host nearly every major retailer imaginable. Cucumber, berry, and apple farmers struggle to compete with producers in Sri Lanka, Mexico, Chile, and China. Farmland is giving way to housing developments, as Seattle commuters look further north for affordable housing.

Thousands of farm workers from Mexico have been drawn to Skagit County, where they work in fields, fish processing plants, restaurants, and construction. Seasonal workers crowd into nine migrant labor camps from June through October. Most of Skagit County's immigrant workers are undocumented, placing them at constant risk of deportation. Skagit County Jail is used as a holding facility for immigrants arrested by local law enforcement and detained by the Department of Homeland Security for deportation.

When we first started Tierra Nueva del Norte, we moved into a downscale residential neighborhood a few blocks from the Latino center of Burlington. We visited immigrants in the strawberry and cucumber fields and migrant labor camps of the Skagit Valley. I was hired as part-time chaplain of Skagit County jail, where I lead Spanish Bible studies twice a week. The jail serves as the primary connection between Tierra Nueva and the most marginalized Latinos. Many men ask me to visit their families, assist them with immigration and other legal difficulties, or help them get into drug or alcohol treatment programs.

The Tierra Nueva ministry grew rapidly and became increasingly demanding. Migrants and ex-offenders came to our house day and night, and we soon needed trained volunteers and a way for cultivating future staff.

Our first seminars involved bringing farmers, farm workers, and community members together to oppose INS raids. We then began offering theological courses with titles like "Reading the Bible With the Damned" and "Walking With People on the Margins." We expanded our courses to include seminarians and community members. The People's Seminary-Seminario del Pueblo was formally launched in 2000 with help from a generous grant.

The People's Seminary is up and running as an ecumenical learning center where people from the mainstream and the edges meet for scripture study and theological reflection in preparation for service, ministry, and social transformation. Scholars and leaders from all over the world come to teach here—with farm workers, ex-offenders, and people who serve at the margins.

Tierra Nueva now includes eight full-time staff, 17 half-time Honduran workers, and many volunteers who operate the Skagit County jail ministry, a family support center, Camino de Emmaus-Road to Emmaus (a bilingual faith community), The People's Seminary, and the original community at Tierra Nueva in Honduras.

IN JULY 2002, Gracie and I, with our children, moved out of Burlington to the New Earth Refuge. Now a healthy 20 minutes away from Tierra Nueva and The People's Seminary (instead of three blocks), we are coexisting with raccoons, beaver, river otter, coyotes, deer, hawks, eagles, and numerous migratory bird species. In addition we are raising eight sheep, a llama, a dog, two rabbits, a rat, and a guinea pig.

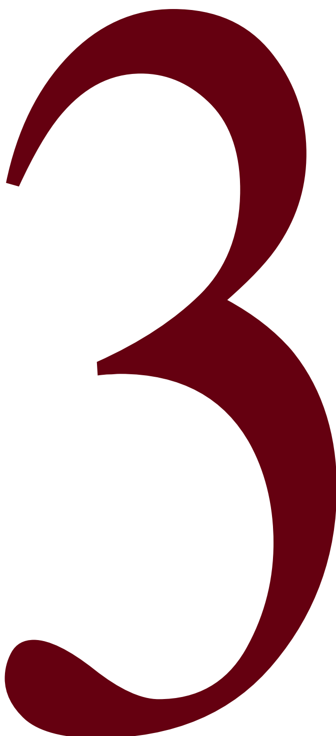
Since this is our home, our first commitment is to learn to live out spiritual practices that sustain us for life and ministry as both individuals and a family. We are com-

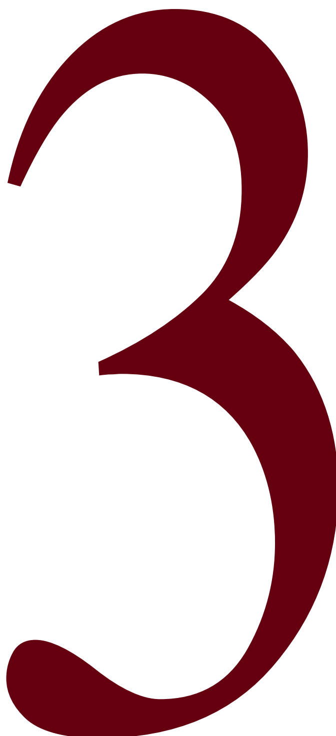
## Finding Refuge in God's New Earth (cont.)

mitted to watchfulness, which includes daily prayer and scripture reading—morning, noon, and night when possible—regular walks, and Sunday worship. We also intend to offer hospitality to friends, families, and people visiting Tierra Nueva or taking courses at The People's Seminary. Seeing the beauty requires cultivating watchfulness and prayer—precursors to contemplation. I am convinced that we all need sanctuaries so we cannot only survive but flourish in the struggle for life and liberation.

Snow geese are flying low over our land today—free over this acreage from the danger of hunters. Last night's Bible study in the jail was on Jesus as our "coyote"—who brings us into the Reign of God, into the Garden, the New Earth, against the law, free of charge. There is good news to be discovered and new life to be protected from the hunters, whether they are law-enforcers, addictions, or other forces that oppress. Living a sustainable life in these dark times demands constant watching, praying, and delight. Without times of retreat and fellowship, all people, including those seeking to serve in the mainstream or at the margins will become endangered species. Yet with or without a riverfront paradise, we affirm with the psalmist: "God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:8). ■

*Bob Ekblad was a Presbyterian pastor and executive director of Tierra Nueva and The People's Seminary when this article appeared in the March 2004 issue of* Sojourners.





# STRADDLING THE BORDER

***by Elizabeth Palmberg***

BorderLinks, a binational organization educating people about the realities of the U.S.-Mexico border, has always been good at getting personal without thinking small. More than a thousand people from the United States participate in its educational delegations each year, and almost all stay overnight and break bread with families in the *colonias* (poor neighborhoods) of Nogales, in the state of Sonora, Mexico.

"What distinguishes BorderLinks is that it's very relationship-based," says staff member Heather Craigie. That commitment has stayed constant during the past 15 years, as the group has become a vibrant combination of community center, think tank, conference catalyst, micro-enterprise innovator, and educational tourism bureau.

Born in the late 1980s as part of the sanctuary movement, BorderLinks initially brought delegations to the U.S. border to experience the realities faced by refugees from U.S.-supported conflicts in Central America. Today, the group focuses on globalization's impact. NAFTA-induced changes in farm policy are driving many former campesinos to U.S. service jobs or low-paid urban labor pools for Mexican maquilas (foreign-owned export factories), and communities face health problems, massive poverty, crime, and environmental devastation.

EDUCATIONAL DELEGATIONS remain a key part of BorderLinks' work (and of its funding structure). A typical seminar, which lasts about a week, involves a home stay, a lesson in border history, visits to a maquila, meetings with health officials and the U.S. Border Patrol, and a trip to a Sonora supermarket (where prices approximate those in the United States, although Mexican wages are much lower). BorderLinks' Mexico director, Kiko Trujillo, a former director of the Nogales Chamber of Commerce, sometimes briefs visitors on the issues overlooked by NAFTA, such as the environment, the farming community, and the small businesses squeezed out by corporations. One of the most "difficult and profound" parts of many delegations, according to Craigie, is visiting would-be migrants about to risk the desert crossing into the United States, a journey that kills dozens each year.

Delegates are encouraged not only to form relationships, but also to analyze and act. "The educational process is not really complete unless you think critically about how you are changed by the experience," says Craigie. For East Congregational Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, this meant reimagining a food pantry that church members had been running for years. Delegation leader Jason Hubbard says they are grateful to BorderLinks for teaching them that "a food pantry is not just about providing cheap or free food—it's a place of connection between two parts of a community."

In recent years BorderLinks has developed into a fully binational organization. Its Sonora headquarters, La Casa de la Misericordia, or Mercy House, hosts popular education seminars and innovative responses to community needs, including a food cooperative, a clothing bank, and an internship program. A pre-existing hot lunch program for children has become the nucleus for a vibrant array of educational opportunities: guitar classes and English classes, after-school tutoring, a bike repair workshop, and clubs for chess, crafts, poetry, and theater.

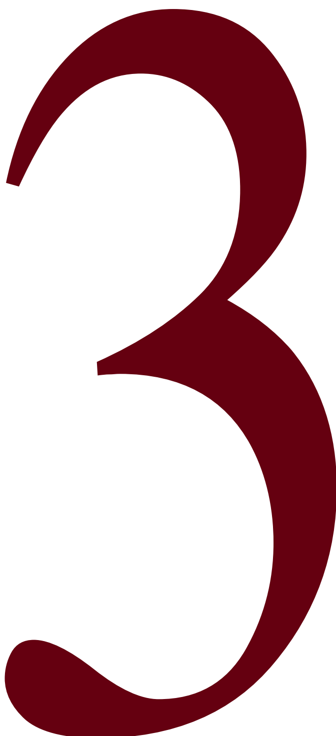
BorderLinks also hosts Encuentros, binational gatherings about topics such as migration, border economics, and border theology. At a recent Encuentro on alternative technologies, craftspeople from Arizona and Sonora taught workshops at La Casa

## Straddling the Border (cont.)

on soap-making, composting toilets, solar water heaters made from junkyard components, and alternative building techniques using recycled newspapers and tires.

Faith-based BorderLinks delegations often reflect on Mark 4:35, in which Jesus invites his disciples to "cross over to the other side of the lake," journeying past Jewish borders. Such bridge building, in its largest sense, is BorderLinks' ultimate vision: "Building bridges across borders cannot just mean the border between the United States and Mexico," according to co-founder Rick Ufford-Chase. "It has to mean the borders of misunderstanding, suspicion, and hostility that, although they may be built on historical experience, have divided us for too long." ■

*Elizabeth Palmberg is assistant editor of* Sojourners. *This article appeared in the March-April 2003 issue of* Sojourners.



# SESSION 4

## *Letting Faith Guide Us Toward Just and Humane Policies*

- "Welcoming the Stranger," by Jeff Carr
- "It's About Being Human," by Aaron Gallegos
- "What's At Stake? Compassion, not Criminalization, in Immigration Reform," by Laurna Strikwerda

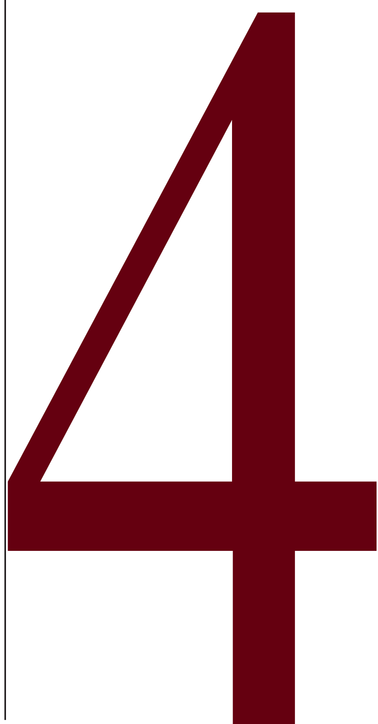
It is important for churches and other ethical leaders to provide wisdom and guidance for the wider public on how to create just and humane immigration policies. It is also important to address the fear that many Americans live with after 9-11 and to create safe and secure borders. This can be done without scapegoating those who seek human dignity for themselves and their families.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Create your own set of principles for creating compassionate immigration policies. What values or experiences contribute to your priorities?

2. Carr and Strikwerda write that citizenship for the undocumented is a key part of a more humane immigration policy. Do you think this is a faithful application of the Leviticus 19 command to treat the strangers among us as citizens?

3. How does Matthew 25's instruction to welcome the stranger take form in your life and faith community? How should it inform our national policies?

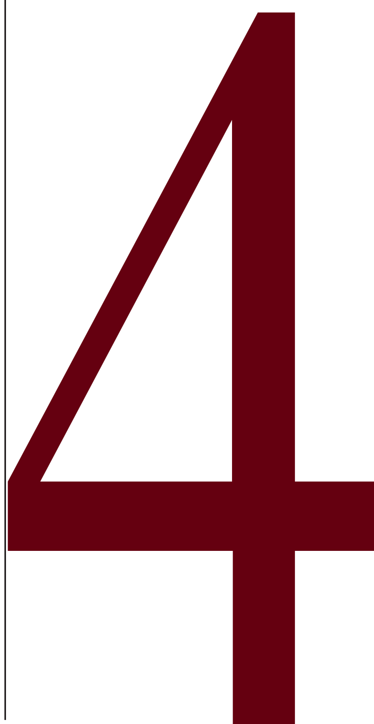


### RESOURCES

• *A Day Without a Mexican*, directed by Sergio Arau and co-written by Arau and Yareli Arizmendi, plays out a scenario in which all Mexicans suddenly disappear from California. Though humorous, the movie also takes a serious look at Mexicans' contributions in the U.S. (Televisa Cine, 2004)

• The Office of Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.nccbuscc.org/mrs) and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (www.lirs.org), are two of the largest resettlers of refugees in the country. The USCCB also maintains an active legal advocacy wing fighting for more humane laws concerning migration, while the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's 1997 "A Message on Immigration" urged fair and generous immigration laws as a part of the church's mission.

• World Relief is one of the few evangelical organizations supporting positive immigration reform. "Among Evangelicals in the United States, the fastest growing are found among the Independent immigrant churches.... In 20 years, African, Asian, and Latin American Evangelicals...will likely be at the forefront of...global movements as well as their manifestations in the USA," says WR's statement. (www.wr.org)



# WELCOMING THE STRANGER

*by Jeff Carr*

When was the last time you heard a Catholic cardinal calling his flock to civil disobedience? That's what Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony did in his Lenten message in March 2006, urging his people to make room "for the stranger in our midst, praying for the courage and strength to offer our spiritual and pastoral ministry to all who come to us." The strangers to whom he was referring are the estimated 11.5 to 12 million undocumented immigrants living on the margins of our society.

The simmering immigration debate heated up this past week, as the Senate Judiciary Committee began to discuss a bill by Chairman Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) to reform immigration laws and create a guest worker program. This comes on the heels of a bill passed in December 2005 by the House (H.R. 4437) focusing primarily on how to secure our borders from undocumented migrants, mostly from Mexico and other Latin American countries. Much of the debate up to this point has been focused on border security, the job market, and political bargaining. All that changed, however, when Mahony added the moral dimension to the debate.

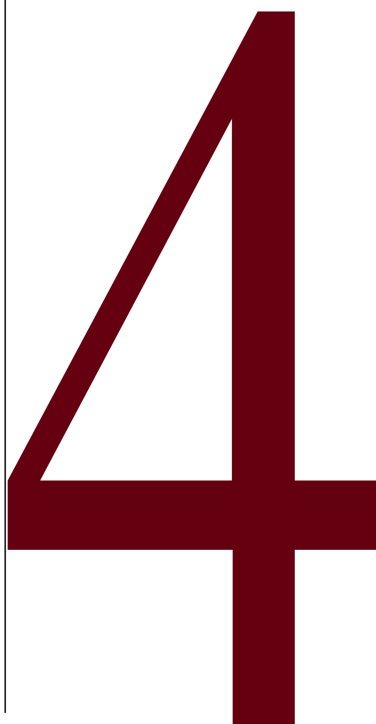
He and many other religious leaders are particularly concerned about a provision in H.R. 4437 (also in Specter's bill) that would impose sanctions on anyone who assists undocumented immigrants in remaining in the U.S. If enacted into law, this bill would criminalize social service workers and others who provide compassionate or humanitarian aid to undocumented people, including churches and faith-based organizations. The crime would be a felony, potentially punishable by stiff fines and up to five years in prison. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Mahony said that if Congress passes the bill, he will instruct the priests in his 288 parishes to defy the law in open civil disobedience.

Prior to coming to Sojourners, I spent 17 years living and working a few miles west of the cardinal's cathedral in one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Los Angeles. I was privileged to direct the Bresee Community Center, a faith-based organization that provides educational programs, job training, health care, and basic social services for young people and their families. Through the years, I developed personal relationships with hundreds of children and families who didn't possess a piece of paper that afforded them legal status in this country. If the law being considered by Congress were passed while I was directing the center, I would surely have gone to jail.

We certainly need humane immigration reform in this country, but a mean-spirited criminalization approach that focuses only on border security is not the answer. We can't realistically deport nearly 12 million people, and if we somehow could, our economy would go into a tailspin. Most of the undocumented people I knew were some of the most hardworking, family-oriented people in my neighborhood. They came to this country for the same reasons people have come here for the past 400 years: economic, religious, and political freedom. Many of them fled civil war in their countries or economic conditions so desperate that risking everything to come to this country really wasn't a choice. And most of the young people I worked with had come here at such a young age they had no memories of their home country. They assimilated into our community, learned to speak the language, and educated themselves; yet by no choice of their own, they live in legal limbo.

One young woman I knew fled civil war in a Latin American country, arriving in our community at age 5. She learned English, and, though she went to underperform-

## Welcoming the Stranger (cont.)




ing local public schools, was a model student, worked hard, graduated from high school with honors, and attended an Ivy League school. With private scholarships, her own money, and the help of her parents, she graduated with a degree in political science in three years. When she returned to our community, her sole desire was to invest herself through her work in the lives of other Latina-Latino young people who faced the same odds she did. Due to her undocumented status, however, she is working in the underground economy earning wages that barely make it possible to survive economically.

It is not realistic to think this young woman will return to her war-torn country just because we decide to make her a felon. There is nothing to return to. She is smart, capable, and could be part of helping make our communities stronger. And if this bill passes, millions of people like her won't go home; they will go further underground and become part of the permanent underclass in our society. Instead of rewarding her for hard work, we will penalize her and her family for wanting a better life. That's not America, and it's wrongheaded.

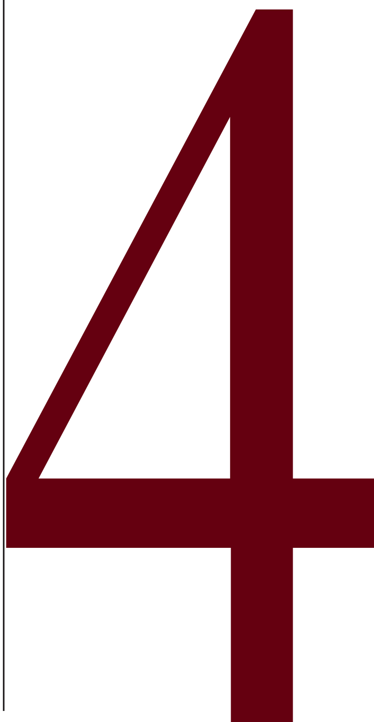
We should follow the outline for immigration reform developed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and other church organizations in their "Justice for Immigrants" campaign:

1. More visas for family members of migrants to reduce what can be decades-long waits to reunify;
2. A guest worker program with a path to permanent residency;
3. Better legal processes to guarantee immigrant rights;
4. Legalization of undocumented migrants;
5. Economic development in poor countries to reduce the need to migrate.

As a person of faith, I believe we should take seriously the writer of Leviticus who says, "When a foreigner lives with you in your land, don't take advantage of him. Treat the foreigner the same as a native. Love him like one of your own. Remember that you were once foreigners in Egypt. I am God, your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34, *The Message*).

I hope Mahony would have room to welcome an evangelical Christian minister such as me to join him and his fellow priests in civil disobedience. It's time for people of faith to stand up on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters, whom I am confident Jesus would have included when he said "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." ■

*Jeff Carr is chief operating officer of Sojourners. This article appeared in the March 15, 2006, issue of* SojoMail.



# IT'S ABOUT BEING HUMAN

*by Aaron McCarroll Gallegos*

"This year we're going to march together into the Promised Land," Dallas anti-violence activist Blanca Martinez told a group of young, mostly Latino pilgrims at a 1996 peace summit in Washington, D.C. Her statement may be prophetic indeed, for after years of wandering in the American political wilderness, Latinos are poised to ford the mainstream and make a stronger political impact than ever before.

For some time now the political juice of the Latino community has been boiling around issues such as the April 1996 video-taped beating of undocumented immigrants by Riverside County police, California's Proposition 187, affirmative action rollbacks, and sharp new punitive measures that are applied disproportionately to people of color. Left with few alternatives, the diverse—and, at times, antagonistic—political, racial, and cultural factions of the U.S. Latino community are taking advantage of this election year to defend their rights—and perhaps some of America's most preciously held values as well.

Adding fuel to the fire is PBS's four-part series *Chicano!* which, since its original airing in 1996, continues to be shown by Latino community groups and students. *Chicano!* reminds us of the important contribution that Latinos made to America's civil rights movement in the era before the movement splintered into camps competing with each other on the basis of ethnicity, class, gender, or sexual orientation.

"Latinos of that period thought of it as one movement for the civil rights of all Americans," said Raul Yzaguirre of the National Council of La Raza. "An assault on any people is an assault on all people."

Indeed, for many "Latinos," "Hispanics," "Boricuas," "Chicanos," "Central Americans"—whatever you call us—America's modern conception of race has been somewhat dysfunctional. Of course racial categories and racism exist south of the border as well; but because many Latino families are multiracial, it has always been difficult to fit into a system that is so fixated on the racial poles of black and white. The mix that Latinos bring to America's so-called melting pot may just help to blow the lid off America's limited understanding of race, which has historically attempted to put individuals into a color slot and then award or punish them accordingly.

ADDING TO THE complexity is the current round of rhetorical and literal immigrant bashing. For many Chicanos and other Latinos, the saying "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us" has become more than a slogan. It is a statement that their forebears were here long before the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hildago, which turned the northern half of Mexico into what is now the Southwest United States—overnight changing their ancestors from *mexicanos* to "Mexican Americans."

The failure to recognize this has resulted in policies that treat Latinos as if they are in some way "alien" to the United States. Yet the presence of Latinos, and the movement of others northward, has been as central to the settlement of the United States as the 19th century westward migration of Anglos.

The Latino vote has the potential to have an increasingly powerful impact in American political life. Partly because "Hispanics can be of any race," it matters less what ethnicity candidates belong to—or even what party—but whether or not they are truly responsive to the barrios that the mainstream wrote off long ago. This also goes for the first- and second-wave Latino organizations such as LULAC, MALDEF, and

## It's About Being Human (cont.)

National Council of La Raza; they have done great work in the past, but because of their professional focus and corporate ties, they now risk alienation from a new generation of activists.

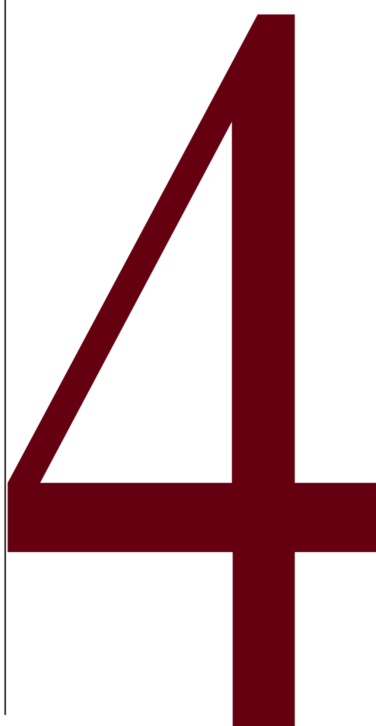
The political acumen of this new generation was on display in April 1996 when Barrios Unidos, an anti-violence group involved with Latino youth around the country, brought more than 500 young people to Washington, D.C., for the National Peace Summit. There they invited members of Congress and the administration to join them in working with communities to find lasting solutions to the most critical issues faced by urban America.

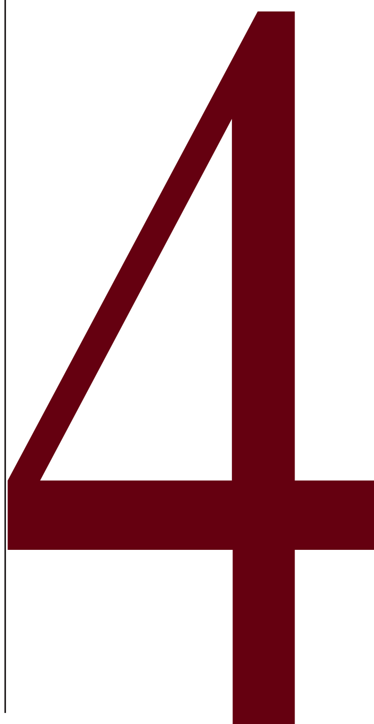
These young people were very clear: What is needed in the barrios isn't the politics of Left and Right, but a new approach toward urban America that extends from spiritual unity rather than from a reaction to ideological challenges. "It's not about colors or race," explained Luis Angel Viniega, a spiritual adviser for Barrios Unidos. "It's about being human."

It seems ironic that this new vision for the nation is coming from the same young brown and black people that many see as the problem with urban America. It's not often that you hear teenagers—most of whom are too young to vote—talking about building multiracial coalitions of people to create change through the ballot box. But the time has come for these young people who have already seen too many friends and relatives die violently on the streets of their communities. They understand the urgency that is needed for the healing of their communities, and they aren't waiting around for the government to take the lead.

As Blanca Martinez challenged, "We're giving Washington a chance to put money toward something positive on a domestic level. But if they don't help us, we're going to work in the barrio anyway—they can choose if they are with us as friends or not." ■

*Aaron McCarroll Gallegos was news editor of* Sojourners *when this article appeared in the July-August 1996 issue.*






# WHAT'S AT STAKE?

*Compassion, not Criminalization, in Immigration Reform*

***by Laurna Strikwerda***

Immigration is a deeply relevant issue for both Americans and Christians. The U.S. is a nation of immigrants, one that has been continually reshaped by new groups of people bringing diverse cultures, perspectives, and resources. Immigration is also a core issue for Christians: The biblical story continually shows God's concern for the migrant and the outcast. The early Hebrews were "strangers in the land of Egypt" and were asked to remember this heritage by protecting the strangers among them in the promised land. Similarly, throughout the New Testament, Christians are called to care for the outcast and the stranger.

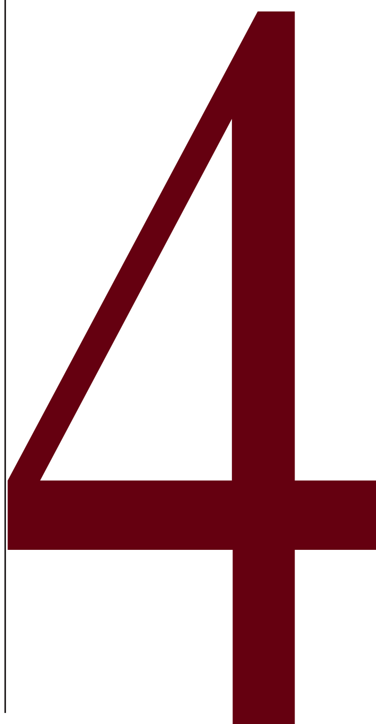
The U.S. desperately needs to heed the biblical imperative to care for the stranger. Since the mid-'90s, when the government established operations in San Diego, El Paso, and Arizona increasing fencing and border security, more than 2,500 people have died of dehydration and exhaustion crossing the desert into the U.S. In addition, thousands of immigrants who do make it into the U.S. are treated inhumanely by an increasingly militarized border security system of police, fences, and jails.

A common misconception exists that immigrants use up national resources. However, immigrants actually contribute $1,800 more on average in annual taxes than they receive in benefits, according to a 1997 study by the National Academy of Sciences. Immigrants pay local taxes through work, purchases, and housing, as well as direct federal taxes. Young immigrant workers contribute to Social Security through payroll taxes. Immigration is also key to a vital economy; in the U.S. immigrants add about $10 billion annually to the U.S. economy. Immigrants to the U.S., documented and undocumented, contribute a great deal to our national economy and government.

One of the primary reasons for immigration is deterioration of economies in sending countries—those from which people emigrate. Ironically, many of the free trade policies promoted by the United States indirectly result in immigration to the U.S. In many sending countries, small farmers cannot compete in a marketplace increasingly dominated by large agribusinesses. In Mexico, a million small farmers have lost their farms as a result of being unable to sell the corn and grain they grew in an increasingly unfair market. This loss of farmland is tied to the subsidies farmers and agribusinesses receive in the U.S.: Because farms in the U.S. receive government subsidies, they can afford to sell their product at a much lower price than small farmers in developing countries, where governments cannot or do not offer subsidies. At the same time, many small businesses in Mexico have had to close when large-scale U.S. corporations arrived; the local small businesses could not compete with large-scale U.S. industries. Thus, many Mexican farmers and laborers have had little choice but to migrate looking for work.

Additionally, it is important to note that some people who arrive in the United States are refugees. Refugees may be fleeing violence inflicted by their own government or civil war in their home country. Also, many refugees flee because they are not adequately protected by the laws of their home country. For instance, some women dealing with severe domestic violence are not protected from their abusers and seek refugee status in another country. The U.S. government has established limits on the numbers of people from any region that can receive refugee or "asylee" status. In 2005, the U.S. set the total number of refugees who could be admitted at 70,000. Not

## What's At Stake? (cont.)



all refugees receive the necessary documentation to stay in the U.S.; some come to the U.S. without documentation and apply for asylee status. If they do not receive that status, however, they sometimes remain without documentation.

Comprehensive immigration reform is strongly linked to supporting families. Under current immigration law, many families must wait years to be reunited. While there is no official data on how many undocumented immigrants come to the U.S. to rejoin their families, data shows that many documented immigrants do come to the U.S. for that reason. The American Friends Service Committee reports that in 1999, 475,000 of the 650,000 people granted legal residency in the U.S. came through family sponsorship.

What would comprehensive immigration reform look like? Sojourners and Call to Renewal join with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, World Relief, and a host of other faith-based advocates in calling for a comprehensive approach to immigration reform that addresses the root causes of migration, provides a path to citizenship for undocumented workers, establishes appropriate worker protections for both U.S.- and foreign-born workers, and removes the unnecessary and harmful legal obstacles that currently keep families separated across borders for decades.

One vital part of reforming the system is to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented workers. While many Americans are wary of providing citizenship to people who have come to the U.S. illegally, there are several sound reasons for providing citizenship. Immigrants are not a drain on tax dollars. Additionally, they contribute to our economy, often taking jobs that Americans do not take. If a path to citizenship is not provided for in immigration reform, our country could have a permanent subclass of guest workers—people who work, live, pay taxes, and go to school in the U.S., but cannot advance in it.

We read in Leviticus 19, "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." America has long been a nation of immigrants, and our legislation for immigration reform should reflect that. ■

*Laurna Strikwerda was policy intern for Call to Renewal when this article appeared as part of a Sojourners action alert in March 2006.*

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