

IMMIGRATION MATTERS – May 2017

Office of Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation, Sisters of Charity of New York

QUATEMALA

Recently, I traveled to Guatemala to observe various programs operated by the Sisters of Charity of New York. It was an amazing visit, which provided me insight into the reasons why so many people in poverty stricken countries seek to immigrate to our country. While in Guatemala I not only witnessed the poorest of the poor but also met with many of the victims of great violence. The economy in Guatemala, as in many other countries of the third world, is not improving.



Everyone's natural inclination is to survive, to seek better. Add to this survival instinct the desire to run from the violence suffered all their lives and know they must get out. I am betting that you or I would do it for either of the above reasons, let alone both... So when given the opportunity; they will walk hundreds of miles and/or pay thousands of long saved dollars for travel to America... Didn't our own parents or grandparents seek survival here? This dream keeps millions alive! If I truly live my faith, I know I must share my country with others. But so many others now seem to be turning their backs on such fellow human beings. .. The Sisters of Charity, the Methodist Church and The Mennonites are in countries such as Guatemala providing education, hope and love to those longing to change their lives. The example I witnessed was at the Barbara Ford Peace Center in Santa Cruz, Quiche, Guatemala. Here is a thriving center of hope. Education in farming techniques, production of honey, raising animals for production, are just some of the techniques being taught. Reading, mathematics, marketing and sales programs are also available. Most important is that young people are being provided a way out of the ever-present downward spiral of violence. In this and other programs, native Guatemalans have the hope of survival and a means to smile and live a violent free life - right there in their own country. Without such help, the alternative is the walk to America. But, our doors are shutting out so many of our brothers and sisters. Now, our country's leaders seem to see no reasons to provide the necessary aid allowing programs to help people change their lives. The US State Department will be cutting aid to Guatemala by 39% if the present budget proposal is passed. Thus, both roads to survival will now be shutting down. Is this the America we were founded to be? I wish that more Americans had the opportunity to look into the sad eyes of these wonderful people. Hopefully, you will join me in demanding that we let folks walk either path.

Bill Hurley, Associate, Sisters of Charity of New York and member of SCNY Immigration Task Force.



WORLD REFUGEE DAY is celebrated on June 20, 2017.

We pause and remember the 21 million people who have had to flee their countries in search of safety for their families. Refugees are people looking for the same thing that everyone wants: happiness and a safe home for their families. Here are some refugees you may know: Albert Einstein, Gloria Estefan, Henry Kissinger, and Madeline Albright. A World Refugee Day Taize prayer will be held at Mt. St. Vincent Convent at 4:15 pm June 20. All are invited!



Support Our Immigrant Community by Passing the Bridge Act. There are currently over 741,000 young undocumented individuals, known as Dreamers, who are living in fear and uncertainty because President Trump has

threatened to repeal the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program. Acknowledging that President Trump has already signed executive orders harming our immigrant community, we cannot wait for him to hurt Dreamers! Join us in calling on Congress to pass the BRIDGE Act, bipartisan legislation that extends provisional status given to DACA recipients and those who qualify.

GreenLightNY/Drivers Licenses The New York Immigration Coalition is working to coordinate efforts around the state to help pass A 4050. This bill would allow residents of NY to obtain a drivers license without regard to immigration status. **Contact your State Assembly representative to help move it out of the Transportation Committee.**



IMMIGRATION COURT and New Sanctuary Coalition Volunteers –
Bruce Segal, SCNY Coordinator for Immigration Matters, reflects on his accompaniment.

It was a sunny day. There were about seven of us who volunteered to accompany three undocumented immigrants. We met at Dunking Donuts on Broadway downtown. We moved across the street to Federal Plaza and the Immigration Courts. First we had to pass through an extensive security check. The courts were on the 12th Floor. The first thing we encountered was a cancellation. Without notice one of our immigrant friends was to go home and await further instructions by mail. We immediately picked up another case. It was a young man (17) from Guatemala who was seeking asylum and his older brother from the US. It was about 9 AM. We went to the court where the case was being heard. We met and greeted the two brothers. Our leader, who spoke Spanish, told them who we were and our intention to support them. There were over 40 cases for the morning schedule. Most cases were represented by attorneys. Those who were not represented by an attorney were heard last because there were special instructions that needed to be given by the Judge through an interpreter. They were informed about the necessary forms and especially the right to be represented by an attorney. They were given a list of attorneys, especially from Legal Aid, who worked at much reduced or no cost. At about 11:45 AM the young man's case was heard. They said they would like to get an attorney and that they were seeking asylum because of the conditions in Guatemala. Their hearing was set for February 2, 2018. We gathered outside the court room and extended our best wishes and encouragement to our new immigrant friends.

Bruce Segall, SCNY Coordinator for Immigration Matters, June 6, 2017