Vision
November/December 2018
Volume 28, No. 6

A publication of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains

Immigrants and Refugees: Ministry to the most vulnerable

How do we minister to refugees? With the skills we have – by David Lichter, Executive Director……………………………………..2

Two backpacks: A story of death and life on the border – by Laura Stump Kennedy………………………………………………3

African refugees in France get an accompanying presence – by Linda Arnold ……………………………………………………………7

Venezuelan refugees pouring across Colombian border share food and fellowship – by Mary Tracy……………………………………9

Listen to immigrants’ stories with cultural humility – by Louise Anne Pinette de Siller……………………………………………..11

Ministry in a detention center from the inside out – by Maggie Finley……………………………………………………………….13

College chaplain suffers with undocumented students – by John DeCostanza…………………………………………………….15

Immigration attorneys offer guidance for spiritual care providers – by David Lewellen, Vision editor………………………….17

Along with ministry, advocate to change the system – by Edgardo Farias……………………………………………………………18

Certification Update

Renewal of certification: Here’s what you need to know – by Kathy Ponce………………………………………………………………20

© 2018 National Association of Catholic Chaplains
Read Vision online at www.nacc.org/vision/
How do we minister to refugees? With the skills we have

By David Lichter, Executive Director

We appreciate very much the articles in this issue of *Vision* that explore a variety of topics on our immigrant/refugee population. This is not our usual spiritual care population, nor is it provided in our usual ministry settings.

When our Raskob Partners in Pastoral Care Planning met in October 2016, we focused mainly on the usual settings where pastoral care might be needed, such as healthcare, elder care, home, and prisons. However, the needs of migrants, immigrants, and refugees soon became the focus of our attention. As Elisabeth Roman, president of the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry, and a member of our Partners in Planning, said, “What can we come up with to connect with this population in this time of crisis?”

We realized that the social climate has gone from care for immigrants to care for people in trauma. People need hope to move forward, and to be affirmed in personal dignity. How do we touch this population in the course of other ministries where they can be found and encountered? How do we bring forth sensitivity and active listening to support a person’s spiritual journey to find their inner peace in spite of uncertainty and anxiety?

But when we sought to identify the necessary pastoral care competencies for working with these populations, we found the job was expansive and complicated. Why? As our meeting notes commented, “each of these populations is comprised of multiple nationalities with their own customs, language and culture. They can be of any faith or no faith, often not Christian. They can look like you and me. They might be single, family, family group, any age and either gender. They fall within varied social support networks.”

We observed that the single young male is the most vulnerable, because he often falls outside any supportive social/family structure. He often disappears until he is caught up in some other system.

We realized that when services are sought, they are already in crisis mode, and need hope, especially when trying to navigate the unfamiliar, and often hostile, mainline culture(s) marked by a creeping nationalism, superiority and self-righteousness that feeds fear and anxiety.

When we tried to identify competencies, we agreed that because encounters with these populations are within many of the established ministries of healthcare, long term/elder care, corrections and diocesan ministry, the skills needed are present within those ministries, with an extended sensitivity to the critical needs of the displaced person (culture, custom, language, faith, etc.). However, we took special note of: the ability to listen with a particular understanding and acceptance of differences; exceptional compassion, empathy and reassurance for their personal and family concerns; heightened respect of person and their human value; providing reassurance and forgiveness; and assessment of spiritual distress.

While we do not have CPE programs in ICE detention centers to help us discover new ways of serving, we do know that physical needs often precede spiritual needs. Our pastoral care ministry becomes creative and extemporaneous – attempting to match resources to need.

This is part of our continuing the healing ministry in the name of the Church. I appreciate those who contributed to this issue, and I pray that it stirs each of us to be more alert to these often hidden, but holy populations.
Two backpacks: A story of death and life on the border¹

By Laura Stump Kennedy

He walked in with two muddy backpacks, one hanging loosely on his slumped, tired back and one clenched in his hand, straps dragging on the floor. He lowered himself into a chair and said nothing — just stared into the distance with glassy eyes and set his backpacks gently on the ground.

We rushed right past him, answering questions and helping everyone settle in, offering them coffee, food and the information they craved to calm their uneasiness. Where are we? Can we sleep here? Have you seen my brother?

But he said nothing.

Things settled around him, and for hours he remained still, except for a few cellphone calls, which he took with his face buried in his hand, rubbing his eyes and his forehead as if to bring himself back to the present, to wake himself up.

Hours passed before he said anything. He dragged himself to the back of the Migrant Center, stood in front of me at the desk and mumbled something unintelligible.

“I’m sorry, sir, but you’ll have to speak a little louder,” I urged, wondering whether he was in fact a migrant or someone who’d wandered in and who’d had a little too much to drink that morning.

“What’s your name?”

“Silvestre.”

“OK, Silvestre. How can I help you?”

“I ... I ...” he rasped, not meeting my eyes, “I need ... I’m supposed to call. About my wife. I need to call the consulate. I’m supposed to call the consulate ... my wife ...”

“OK, Silvestre. Don’t worry, I’m sure she’ll be released soon,” putting on my best nobody-panic-you’ll-be-fine voice, “but because it’s Sunday, we can’t call the consulate today. Where did you last see her?”

“No,” he said, tears springing to his already puffy eyes, “she’s dead. My wife died in Naco last night.”
The words hit us both with equal weight, as if speaking them dragged him back to the present — to the inescapable tragedy of having left home with his partner, destined for a dangerous and somewhat humiliating “criminal” passage toward a promising future. The tragedy of watching his wife die, then being detained and processed like a criminal and spit out, penniless, into a city far from home. The tragedy of knowing that “home” is no longer the same, because she was his home, and now her absence defines every place, every conversation, everything.

He landed in the present. Awareness washed over him with his own words. He cried, I cried. As strangers, we cried together, accepting the unchangeable loss, the sorrow, the painful process of waking up.

I don’t know how many minutes passed before he finally stood up from the chair into which he’d collapsed. He excused himself and stepped outside, continuing to grieve in private.

For several hours I checked on him, bringing a chair, more water, more tissues, and finally a burrito — the first thing he’d eaten since losing her. Little by little, Silvestre shared what had happened.

He and Elsa had come to the border, looking for passage into the U.S. to earn better wages and support their aging parents back home. They also had children from previous relationships who needed more financial support for school.

He shared how they climbed over the high border fence from Naco, Sonora, into Naco, AZ, with information being fed to them through a cellphone from their guide. In climbing the fence, Elsa fell very far but seemed to be fine.

It was raining and dark as they moved quickly from the fence in the direction they’d been told by their guide. But in a matter of minutes, Elsa began to feel weak. She told Silvestre her shoes were too heavy, her pants too tight, that she couldn’t continue. She began to try to undress herself, freeing herself from the weight of her clothing.

Silvestre could tell something was very wrong. He called the guide, who told him that if Elsa was really sick, they should turn themselves in to the Border Patrol. Silvestre helped his wife lie down on the ground, placing her backpack under her head, and ran for help.

By the time he returned with the Border Patrol, Elsa was unconscious, and medical help was slow to arrive. When they did, they pronounced her dead, cause undetermined.

Was it the fall? Was she already sick? Would they have been able to help her if we were closer to a hospital? If someone responded sooner?

Of all the questions that Silvestre worried about that first day, none was as haunting as one: 

*Was this my fault? I knew I shouldn’t have brought her.*
Silvestre passed the day in private mourning. When night fell, I asked him whether he wanted me to call for a ride to the shelter.

“No, gracias. I will walk. I need to walk a little. But just one thing first ...”

He walked back to the entrance of the center and returned with his two backpacks, placing the muddy black one on the desk.

“You should keep her things.”

I opened the bag ceremoniously, slowly removing each item and placing it on the desk. Her jeans, her jacket, her bag of makeup, her hair barrettes — all still damp from last night’s rain. I took in the size and style of each item, recreating Elsa in my mind. I found a damp, ripped picture of the Virgin de Guadalupe in the side pocket of her bag and gently handed it to Silvestre.

“Thank you,” he whispered. Silvestre had finished crying for the day. He picked up his own backpack and slid it over his shoulders, placed the picture in his pocket and left everything else behind.

“Silvestre, you can come back tomorrow,” I offered, not sure what else to say. He accepted with a weak smile and left.

Silvestre did come back. For one week he passed his days in the Migrant Resource Center, on the Mexican side of the border, and his nights in the men’s shelter. We spread the word throughout our volunteer community so that each person received him with extra gentleness and walked beside him as he waited for news from the coroner’s office in Tucson.

On Tuesday afternoon, I brought one blank wooden cross to the center. “Silvestre, we hold this weekly vigil in Douglas,” I explained, gently handing him the cross. “We remember and honor all those who’ve died around here in the desert. If it’s all right with you, I would like to make a cross for Elsa.”

He looked at me, eyes brimming with tears, as I pulled a marker out of the drawer.

“Gracias,” he said emphatically, placing his hand on my hand, looking into my eyes, “gracias.”

He grasped the marker and carefully etched her name in all capital letters. We added her birthday. Her death day. The words, “Mother, Sister, Daughter, Wife, Friend.” I wrapped her carefully in my arms and carried her out of the center.

I crossed through the port of entry on foot, handing over my passport without saying a single word or being asked a single question, all the while clutching her to my chest.
We crossed to the U.S. in less than 30 seconds — a journey she died making.

Carrying her with me, I couldn’t shake the one haunting question:

Was this my fault?

Did I do this? Did we do this? Are we responsible for what happened to Elsa?

We can’t take complete responsibility. Just like I told Silvestre, there are choices and factors here that are beyond us.

But I can’t deny that my country’s policies add to the pain and suffering of women such as Elsa, their families, and their communities. I can’t claim that their choices to migrate are independent of me and what I buy, whom I vote for, and what I do or don’t say to my legislators about immigration reform.

I’m involved. And when I work for positive reform, it will be for Elsa and the countless others who experience the same suffering. It will be remembering the families that receive no news or bad news about their loved ones.

It will be remembering the image of Silvestre with two backpacks. Silvestre etching Elsa’s name on a cross.

I dutifully carried her to the vigil that day and placed her alongside the hundreds of others. One more cross, one more name, one more life ending too early in the desert. That Tuesday we prayed for Elsa and her family, just like I’d told Silvestre we’d do. And we’ll continue for countless Tuesdays to come.

Please pray with us. Please work for justice for Elsa. For everyone.

Laura Stump Kennedy was the U.S. coordinator of the Migrant Resource Center from 2012-2013. She wrote this article at the end of her time as an intern with Frontera de Cristo.

¹ Reprinted with permission from the website of Frontera de Cristo (http://fronteradecristo.org/)
African refugees in France get an accompanying presence

By Linda Arnold

People ask me frequently, why did you go to Calais? The answer is actually very simple: My ancestors were refugees from Europe, fleeing religious persecution but also what we now call “economic migrants,” looking for a better life. Mostly they came alone, as young people — not very different from those now.

The even shorter answer is that I’m a chaplain.

I was in France on vacation, as I often am, in the summer of 2016. I read about the refugee “jungle” in The Washington Post and about various organizations of volunteers in the camp. I contacted Care4Calais, a nonreligious British group, by email, and they welcomed me immediately and warmly.

Calais is the closest point to Britain on the French side of the Channel, and there is a freight entrance to the Chunnel there. Most young men, the vast majority of refugees in Calais, try to stow away on trucks crossing at night through the tunnel. Some have relatives or friends already in England. Some in Calais also hope to get asylum in France. EU law states that you must apply for asylum in the first European country you enter. Clearly, most do not.

The “camp” outside of Calais was worse than I had expected. In fact, it’s impossible to imagine and almost impossible to believe without being there or seeing a photo. It was a city of tents of various sizes or structures made of cardboard, trash bags and plastic sheeting, put together with duct tape. There were dusty, gravel “streets,” portable toilets and little boys in flip-flops running everywhere. It was a city of young men, about 7,000 when I was there, with about 700 women and 500 “unaccompanied minors” not too far away living in shipping containers.

During my week at the camp, I did sorting and packing work in the mornings along with the other volunteers, trying to explain at the same time what I, the oldest (clearly) and the only American, was doing there. They also wanted to know why. You can try to explain about the importance, the power of accompaniment, but really, you just have to be there and do it.

I came prepared to teach English, to be with them and listen to their stories. We were told not to ask intrusive questions, not to take pictures and that I would teach French. Well, chaplains have to be flexible, n’est-ce pas? But teaching a language is, of course, an excellent way to be with and to hear a person’s story — in a word, to accompany them. They were eager and earnest. They wanted to tell me about their home country and to know how to say it in English and French. They taught me to say it in Arabic. They taught me their names and mine in Arabic. I think they felt valued and respected because I was interested in their countries (mostly Sudan, Somalia and Afghanistan) and was willing to share a bit about mine. Sitting on the ground on blankets with them, hearing about their families, teaching simple things and listening a lot
seemed so natural. Listening is an act of respect, which is healing. It restored some dignity in this hell on earth. Accompaniment is pastoral care.

On another day, when the weather was nasty, we taught inside in a large tent, which had been made into a restaurant. Where the extra food came from I have no idea, but some enterprising gentlemen had collected donated food and were selling it, on a regular basis. Sitting on benches along the walls, men drop by to say what they want to learn. They also want to talk.

I spent three hours with one man, Soulayman, who didn’t want to leave even after I thought I had exhausted what was useful. We didn’t have any exercise books, so I made one from some blank paper we had brought. He copied down tons of stuff, lists of letters, numbers, days of the week, months, phrases, anything to keep going and stay with me. He seemed so sad and lonely, compared to some of the other men who showed a certain bravado, especially when talking with other men. Soulayman had gone from his country, Sudan, to Libya, where he took a boat to Greece and walked the rest of the way with other refugees to France. At 29 years old, he already had some gray in his beard. He had parents and siblings in Sudan but no wife or children. This was a special source of sadness to him. He didn’t want to leave me. I felt in my spirit that he was desperate for a relationship. Of course, he asked whether I was returning tomorrow. We had been told to say “someone will be back tomorrow” and not commit personally. It made me so sad when I had to say that. I guess our sadness touched somewhere. I will never forget his eyes or his voice or his story.

On other days I taught men in ones and twos because it was impossible to make a group, with their knowledge of French being so varied. I asked each one how long they had been there, where they came from, how they got there. The stories were so sad — mostly walk to Libya, boat to Italy or Greece, seeing people dying and dead all around, walking to France. One man had walked through 14 countries. I told each one how brave they were, and they were very pleased and grateful. The conditions in the camp were so terrible that you wonder what it could have been like for them at home. And here in Calais, so many were absolutely alone.

In the fall of 2016, a few months after my visit, the French government registered the 7,000 residents of the camp, put them on buses and attempted to settle them all over France, whether they wanted to or not. The camp was completely destroyed. Many people disappeared, including about 500 unaccompanied minors. Care4Calais is still working in the city to support and feed the hundreds of refugees now living on the street.

Accompaniment is a hard thing. I realized each day my own weakness and that I had nothing to offer but my presence. Their sadness and woundedness were as deep and terrible as the wounds I saw so much of in the hospital. I have come to recognize that experience of accompaniment in Calais as pastoral care — as well as my experiences with refugee children the next year in Paris and the deportees in Mexico last spring. In my weakness, I found God’s strength to give the only gift I had — my presence.

Linda Arnold, PhD, BCC, is the retired director of spiritual care at Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, MD.
Venezuelan refugees pouring across Colombian border share food and fellowship

By Mary Tracy

In late September, I got a close-up look at the Venezuelan refugee crisis in Colombia.

I have been living in Colombia on an extended sabbatical from chaplaincy while my husband works for the U.S. Agency for International Development. During my nearly year and a half in Bogotá, I have been asking taxi drivers their opinion about the Venezuelan situation. We usually start with how Colombia has been a good neighbor to Venezuela by receiving so many refugees in recent years. Then we talk about how strange it must feel for Colombians to be on the receiving end of a refugee influx, after many years of a mass migration in the other direction. During the 1980s and ‘90s, it was Venezuela that maintained an open-border policy toward its Colombian neighbors fleeing rampant drug- and terrorism-fueled violence.

At this point, my taxi-driving interviewee would usually shrug, and I would speculate aloud that the current situation is not sustainable. The taxi driver would vigorously nod, usually with a sad expression, as if to say, “No matter how much Colombians want to return the favor now that it is Venezuelans in crisis, how many immigrants can we absorb?” Indeed, it seemed clear that Venezuelans would continue to flee the widespread starvation, currency hyperinflation and lack of healthcare – and in greater numbers.

And so in this context, on a perfect, sunny morning, I arrive at Villa del Rosario, on the border between the countries to begin my three-day volunteer stint at the soup kitchen Casa de Paso Divina Providencia of the Diocese of Cúcuta, more commonly known as El Comedor (The Dining Room). My taxi driver and I know that we are close to the soup kitchen when we see the withered-grass soccer field rimmed by refugees who have laid clothes out to dry. Then we see the tall metal wall with a padlocked door and a long line of people waiting to get in. On this wall are colorful posters of Our Lady, Pope Francis and St. Teresa of Calcutta, and a list of supportive organizations: USAID, World Food Programme, U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops, and UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency.

Mere steps from this sanctuary, an estimated 40,000 Venezuelan refugees walk daily across the Símon Bolívar Bridge into Colombia to get basic necessities such as food and medical care. Most, but not all, return to their country the same day. To put the number in perspective, the United States is reducing the cap on refugees permitted to resettle to 30,000 people next year, down from 45,000 in 2018.

Entering the soup kitchen the first day, the most noticeable feature is how pleasant it feels. While El Comedor’s space is enclosed behind protective metal walls, padlocked doors and large bodyguards, inside is large bandstand, more cheerful signs from supportive organizations, and plenty of trees that shade most of the large sitting area for those who come to serve,pray, eat and occasionally enjoy live music. Lots of construction workers in hard hats are working on one of two new medical facilities for seeing indigent patients.
The first day, I get a brief tour of the kitchen, pantry, consultation space for sick or pregnant patients, and a nearby makeshift shelter for migrant children run by Fundación Renacer. Then I spend the next two days jumping into whatever job needs doing – peeling potatoes, setting out chairs, doling out food, pouring juice, or carrying food for those whose hands are occupied with a baby or items for sale. I am relieved that everyone seems happy to have me there, but there is little fuss over showing me the ropes.

On my third day, I graduate to chopping onions. The tall, lanky gentleman next to me clearly has good knife technique and notices my mountain of oddly shaped, oversized pieces. He puts down his knife and takes over my tormented onion to demonstrate. Renewed by his kindness, I make a second effort. Although my onion pieces are smaller and more uniform this time around, my eyes start watering. Smiling behind his surgical mask (which we are all wearing as protocol), he introduces himself as George Stewart, noting that although he is Venezuelan, one of his parents is British. He then gently motions toward the mountain of yucca. I take my knife and move to the yucca station where a couple of other women, already hard at work, show similar kindness in demonstrating how to debark the large branch-like tuber.

As we hack away at yucca, the women report that they are with one of the volunteer church groups from Venezuela that rotates through the soup kitchen. George, however, is a daily volunteer.

Just before we start serving lunch, I meet Father David, director of El Comedor. I have already heard stories about him from my contact at the Colombian International Rescue Committee. Stories about how he maintains the soup kitchen’s integrity by vetting potential donors and collaborators for mission compatibility. My favorite story is about how, when volunteers and patrons became pushy, demanding and reckless, Father David immediately shut down the soup kitchen until civility and order were restored three days later.

I like this story because it reminds me of one of my favorite scripture passages. As Jesus is sending the apostles out in mission, he exhorts them to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10). Throughout my three days at the soup kitchen, I feel unfailing warmth and hospitality from staff and volunteers and gratitude from the refugee patrons. It does not dawn on me until the second day that many of the volunteers were in the same boat as the patrons, equally grateful for the good food and goodwill inside the metal walls.

The mostly Venezuelan team feels utter frustration and dismay on a daily basis, watching their proud and formerly affluent country fall apart. But it was unmistakable how proud they were to join the joyful work of serving, eating and perhaps even dancing a bit, with their brothers and sisters. The refugees will no doubt continue to come. But thanks to the efforts of El Comedor and its staff, they will find love, hope and support in their hour of need.

Mary Tracy, BCC, was an oncology chaplain at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore before moving to Colombia in 2017.
Listen to immigrants’ stories with cultural humility

By Louise Anne Pinette de Siller

“You shall treat the stranger who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

Migration is part of the human story. But moving brings challenges we expect and many that cannot be foreseen. Our lives change. There is often a need to grieve and let go, but sometimes there is no time or space to do so.

The immigrants and refugees we minister to are submerged in a vast ocean of changes as they struggle to survive and make sense of their new reality. Their needs, surprises and struggles are often the cause of their coming into our pastoral care.

We hold that we all have been created in God’s image and that the variety of races and cultures are a gift to humankind. A tremendous amount of mystery surrounds each person’s process of “becoming” who they are. This mystery abides in cultural diversity as well. Like an iceberg in the ocean, there is the tip we can see and a submerged part that is not visible.

Differences challenge us to make room for them in our hearts and our reality. Cultural change can be difficult and painful, for both those immigrating and those receiving immigrants. Our commitment to ongoing formation in the service of immigrants and refugees requires that we become more aware of unrecognized privilege and power in ministerial settings.

Many among us have sought to become culturally competent, but the attempt can be overwhelming. Because information about a culture has its limits, we as ministers are challenged to allow God’s grace to push back the dynamics of fear that “difference” can arouse. It is important to discover and face our own unconscious biases, assumptions and internal reactions.

In our preparation for ministry, we have been trained to value stories, to hear and hold them with healing reverence, to be nonjudgmental in our awareness, to respect each person’s uniqueness and their need for meaning and purpose. As we serve immigrants and refugees, the skill of cultural humility can support our efforts for respectful encounters and interactions.

As many of you know, cultural humility is based on a humble attitude that fosters a wholesome awareness of one’s cultural deficiencies. It is based on our active participation in a learning encounter, in which the person we serve guides us in discovering what helps or hinders their care and how to help them in a way that makes sense in their new context.

Many have been wounded by trauma. Trauma from fear and violence in their country of origin, trauma during their migration journey, trauma from hostility, rejection and betrayal experienced in the host country. As a result, their loneliness, fear, rejection, and vulnerability can trigger their need for our healing attention. Each story needs to be told and respectfully received, with an appreciation for their courage and strength.
The process of coming into a new cultural identity can be understood in three ways:

On one hand, isolation can result in sitting outside of the host culture, rejecting all that is related to it — refusing to learn the new language and not participating in social or political activities.

On the other hand, the desire to assimilate can result rejecting one’s culture of origin to fully enter the host culture.

A third path is integration, seeking to learn the new country’s language and customs while maintaining one’s cultural identity. Every person and family negotiates this new space differently.

Some families can have generational divides. Children might assimilate through their school culture. They often do not want to speak the family’s language of origin and, as a result, may not be able to communicate with their grandparents, who may have chosen isolation as their means of coping. The parents who are integrating both cultures speak both languages as they adjust and accommodate in their new cultural identity.

Some challenges of transition and relocation are:
- A sense of cultural and social isolation.
- Feelings of ambiguity about themselves, the new society they are in, and those they have left behind.
- Making sense of and learning how the legal system works.
- Participation in the educational system; for example, the care and discipline of their children, communicating and cooperating with teachers and other parents, child care options.
- Understanding the health system; for example, where to go in emergencies and ongoing care, programs that offer them assistance, what is covered and is not covered by insurance.
- Recognizing and adjusting to differences related to time and punctuality.
- Working toward a new sense of belonging.

Grief can severely stress the physical and psychological capacity for health, change and adaptation. Immigrants and refugees deal with multiple issues of loss. Chaplains can encourage the process of mourning to help with the gradual letting go of the psychological attachment to things that are lost. Primary losses are identity, autonomy and authority. Secondary losses are culture, familiar roles, language, security, expectations, forms of interaction and suppositions. Mourning also helps in adapting to loss by making new choices and decisions in the new reality.

We can become an important resource for healing and adaptation as we seek to minister to this group of God’s people.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25:35)

Louise Anne Pinette de Siller is retired chaplain from the Santa Rosa Medical Center Hospital in San Antonio, TX.
Ministry in a detention center from the inside out

By Maggie Finley

The Northwest Detention Center is a private immigration prison in Tacoma, WA, operated by the GEO Group on behalf of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Until September, Esmeralda Saltos was the director of volunteers for the past five years. Although she has stepped back after recent personal family tragedies, her ministry to immigrant detainees continues to be a viable call and personal passion. She still volunteers twice weekly while orienting her successor, Father Isidro Lepez.

Esmeralda’s ministry began in October 2013. It didn’t take long for her then-chaplain supervisor to recognize her gifts and heart for the ministry. He encouraged her to become volunteer coordinator, which was co-sponsored by the Archdiocese of Seattle. At that time, there were only three volunteers to do four services a week.

Now 35 volunteers cover seven services weekly. But Esmeralda says, “We need more since the demand is great, and not all 35 are available to go inside on a regular basis. To me, it’s very important that services occur as scheduled, because this is church: a time for reading Sunday’s scriptures, reflection on them and sharing communion.” Also, of high priority to her is that detainees have something to take away from the readings — some word or image from the text to carry with them into the days and weeks ahead.

Among the detainees, “there is a great deal of sadness, so going to a prayer service makes a big difference in how they cope with their situation,” she said. During services, chaplains invite detainees to take ownership of prayer as lectors (two readings and a psalm). Volunteer chaplains read and deliver a gospel message, then facilitate thoughtful discussion. Prayer services are held in Spanish, although French, Portuguese and some Asian languages are first languages as well. Many detainees have learned English, but for the uneducated fleeing parts of Central and Latin America, this is not the case.

GEO Chaplain Supervisor Keith Henderson screens, orients and trains new volunteers. Initially, there is a four-hour orientation seminar. Once accepted, the chaplain volunteer commits to an annual refresher and evaluation. A significant part of chaplain orientation revolves around fulfilling the terms of Prison Rape Elimination Act, which demands reporting of any signs of abuse or inappropriate behaviors among detainees, staff or volunteers.

Esmeralda shared that there is a disconnect: Detainees are not criminals, but they are prisoners who have broken laws. Not at all trivializing or diminishing the detainee experience, she reports the interior of the prison, though spare, is nice and clean. Hallways are adorned with artwork done by talented inmates. The large gymnasium-like space is configured into units with pods or common areas with round tables and chairs. A guard is assigned to each unit. Some detained sleep on bunks while others have small, private cells with doors. The center can hold 1,575 people. Detainees have access to clinical care and appropriate medications. She adds that in
some ways this is better than living on the street, yet one of the hardships is to adjust to our overly processed food. Food seems to be the metaphor for the separation anxiety they suffer. “To have food prepared at home by the loving hands of a family member is something detainees are accustomed to; without it, they may not eat much.”

What chaplains can do when they encounter the undocumented in healthcare settings? Esmeralda was heartfelt and unwavering. “I would say to chaplains to attend to the family dynamic. As serious as an individual’s problems might be, there is always anxiety and concern about what will happen to the family should anything unfortunate happen to the (patient). And there’s the challenge of trying to balance the need for professional boundaries against communicating some genuine feelings, gestures and words of comfort. They have an opportunity to feel more at ease if they can just sense they are important to you. We’re here for love. So don’t be afraid to be close to Jesus in disguise.”

Maggie Finley, BCC, is a retired chaplain from Providence Hospice of Seattle.
College chaplain suffers with undocumented students

By John DeCostanza

It has been a difficult couple of years in my ministry at a small, Catholic university with a mission-centered commitment to undocumented students. It has been an excruciating period for those I love who are vulnerable and targeted because they are alternately documented in this age.

I live and work and accompany students who are undocumented and many more who have immediate family members at risk. They are my neighbors. When I first wrote some of these reflections in early 2017, DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) had just been rescinded. There were public raids in highly visible locations in Chicago, where I live and work. The crisis of family separation had not yet occurred. In short, the hell that was 2016 for immigrant peoples in the United States would grow even worse.

What sparked my own theological reflection was the intercessory prayer of a student before a routine prayer. Someone I know well prayed through tears, “I am so afraid that my cellphone is going to ring, and it’s going to be my sister telling me that Mom or Dad didn’t come home.”

To be fair, many immigrant advocacy communities across the country were decrying President Obama’s tactics, too.¹ It does not take sophisticated math to be able to see that the executive branch has been ratcheting up removals since 1996,² the year of the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.

The Trump administration’s translation of campaign rhetoric that criminalizes immigrants into concrete policy action is also not new. The Naturalization Act of 1790 confessed the original sin of racism, limiting applicants to “free white persons.” The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the exploitation of labor under the bracero program in the 20th century are just a few moments in the fraught history at the intersection of immigration, culture, capital and labor.

The current administration did not invent xenophobia, but it uses it to communicate falsely to every U.S. Catholic that the human being sitting down the pew from them is a threat. These politics, Francis writes, lock in “a system that causes enormous suffering to the human family, simultaneously assaulting people’s dignity and our Common Home in order to sustain the invisible tyranny of money that only guarantees the privileges of a few.”

Being committed to the common good requires us to get to know our neighbor, but we often do not have opportunities to do that. While I am in daily contact with persons who live at the heart of the immigration bull’s-eye, I am also aware that many well-meaning and passionate Christians in the U.S. are not. We need to find more creative and open venues for the alternatively documented to tell their stories.

But I feel some apprehension about this. I know that sharing stories can change minds and hearts, but right now the safety and security of our undocumented friends is the priority. We all need to think critically before we share news or stories — we run the risk of amplifying the fear in vulnerable communities or, even more egregiously, stealing the voice of immigrant sisters and brothers by appropriating their narratives.

We are called to be both responsible citizens and responsible Christians by caring about our neighbors, but we are called to do it responsibly. As Francis wrote to the World Meeting of Popular Movements in 2017, “Jesus teaches us a different path. Do not classify others in order to see who is a neighbor and who
is not. You can become neighbor to whomever you meet in need, and you will do so if you have compassion in your heart. That is to say, if you have that capacity to suffer with someone else.”

Becoming a neighbor requires compassion, which originates from the Latin roots to suffer with. Most of us in pastoral ministry have received a special call to work across difference (even immigration status) to become a neighbor through the exercise of compassion. Yet what does suffering with mean for me as a minister and theologian when I benefit from the privilege of my own citizenship? I believe there are four priorities (among others):

1. **Listen**: Good immigrant advocacy groups are led by people from the alternatively documented community or have their ear very close to the experience of targeted peoples. We have to be able to listen and follow their direction, especially in regard to action. We cannot “steal shoes” or step in front without permission and reason, which is why relationships are so important.

2. **Connect with a community of value and action**: If we believe that immigrants are human beings and not criminals, we need to find others who believe the same and who act from the same roots in faith and put their bodies on the line.

3. **Speak and share with wisdom**: Let us work to be discerning in what we share about the current enforcement activities (always seek verification from the communities that this affects directly) and, as my colleague said to me recently, seek to empower through our information sharing. The sure sign of truth and love is when our actions and words give away power in order to build it.

4. **Learn and change the long arc of history**: We cannot see and bring about God’s future if we respond to new times with old formulas and broken ideas.

“The grave danger is to disown our neighbors,” Francis said. “When we do so, we deny their humanity and our own humanity without realizing it; we deny ourselves, and we deny the most important Commandments of Jesus. Herein lies the danger, the dehumanization. But here we also find an opportunity: that the light of the love of neighbor may illuminate the Earth with its stunning brightness like a lightning bolt in the dark; that it may wake us up and let true humanity burst through with authentic resistance, resilience and persistence.”

Suffering with people means taking the beating, and it feels as if there are plenty of opportunities to do that these days. If we are not willing to put our bodies and our resources on the line, then we’re really not regarding our neighbors as ourselves.

*John DeCostanza is the director of university ministry at Dominican University in River Forest, IL. This piece appeared in longer form as a blog entry on Daily Theology.*

**Notes**

Immigration attorneys offer guidance for spiritual care providers

By David Lewellen, Vision editor

When chaplains minister to immigrants who may lack documentation, a little legal background may be helpful, but they will also need their usual pastoral care skills.

“An undocumented person in the hospital is really afraid,” said Jay Stratton, an immigration attorney in Seattle, via email. “In their home countries they might be liable to pay a lot of money, especially in emergency situations or where they are victims of crimes. Undocumented people are afraid that ICE will come to the hospital to take them. If they are victims of crimes, especially domestic violence or violent crimes, it is important to give the immigrant the courage to report the crime.”

“You’re seeing a lot of fear, which is understandable,” said Erika Petty, an attorney in Milwaukee. “There’s a chilling effect, even for foreign nationals who have had crimes committed against them. Provide support so person doesn’t feel totally alone.”

Barbara Graham, an attorney at Catholic Charities in Milwaukee, said immigration status should not be a barrier to treatment – apart from the patient’s very natural fears. But for the most part, “the immigrant community doesn’t know what their options are.” Hospital chaplains, she said, see immigrants “long before we ever will.”

Immigrants who are the victims of certain crimes, such as domestic violence, are eligible for a visa, Stratton said, and in that case, “it is important to advocate for them to speak to law enforcement.”

Chaplains also need to learn the local resources available to them. A good starting point is the Catholic Legal Immigration Network,¹ which has a directory of affiliate groups that is searchable by location. “The Catholic conference has really been remarkable on this issue,” Graham said. “They’ve put muscle and money behind it.”

Another resource is the YouTube channel² of Graham’s organization, which offers English and Spanish videos about DACA, domestic violence, naturalization, and other topics. It also offers a deportation kit,³ a checklist of steps to take before an immigrant is sent out of the United States.

“Make sure you help the undocumented immigrant to contact the family,” Stratton said. “Whenever it is unknown what happened to a person, the worst is always assumed, in that they believe they were arrested by ICE. Under the current administration there is a heighten level of fear. Some of it justified, most of it just a general atmosphere of fear.”

Notes
¹ https://cliniclegal.org/
² https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaRqQrPqqvxCYTeyZIKISw/videos
Along with ministry, advocate to change the system

By Edgardo Farias

Chaplaincy is a specialized ministry in a secular institution setting. Most people have heard of police chaplains and prison chaplains but never heard of court chaplains. If the police, courts, and corrections are the three components of the criminal justice system, why have we not seen the need for court chaplains? Could a criminal justice chaplaincy be the bridge and invitation for a profound reflection on the human condition and social problems?

Such a system could be a new paradigm for reform of a criminal system that is in crisis and obsolete. It is a human degradation for the offenders, a mystery for the victims, a scandal for the taxpayers. Police, court and correctional agencies are increasingly unfamiliar with the importance of spiritual care that enables a person to move from dissonance and brokenness to wellbeing and wholeness.

As incarceration rates increase, inmates have fewer opportunities to participate in programs that could promote their well-being after release. The higher incarceration rates also have led to overpopulation. Many state and federal prisons operate at 100 percent or more of capacity. Overcrowding is devastating for health and behavior, as well as increasing the risk of suicide.

The effects of prison do not end with the inmate’s release; they extend beyond the former inmate to affect families, communities and the society. The criminal justice laws have created a large population whose access to public benefits, work, and the right to vote are limited by a criminal conviction. Those with criminal records frequently face lower employment rates and poorer incomes because they are denied work disproportionately. Many states deny business licenses due to a criminal background. Many are not eligible for public housing, student loans, food stamps, and other forms of assistance.

The Catholic Church in America does support an urgent reform to the U.S. immigration system, in response to the realities of separated families and the demands of work that force people to emigrate here. “We judge ourselves as a community of faith by the way we treat the most vulnerable among us,” U.S. and Mexican bishops stated in 2003.¹ “The treatment of migrants challenges the consciences of elected officials, policymakers, enforcement officers, residents of border communities, and providers of legal aid and social services, many of whom share our Catholic faith.”

We are called to assume an attitude of welcome and mercy toward immigrants in the face of the challenging realities they may be experiencing: discrimination and labor exploitation, among others. For this reason, the pastoral care of migrants encourages the churches not to wait for immigrants to arrive at a specific meeting point because the place of action is in the squares, in the borders, in roads, in airports. Everyone in the pews must ask, “How do we get involved practically in humanizing penal and immigration policy?”
The teaching of the Church on the subject of punishment must consider the inherent problems of political power. The idea of justice tends to be identified with the existing social order, which means the Church cannot lose its capacity to look critically at the social reality. It is necessary to adopt a more critical perspective, in contact with real social problems, and in close dialogue with the human sciences.

Also, the lack of a permanent critical examination of our criminal policies has produced a dysfunctional penal system. Policies that focus on prison sentences exact enormous economic costs that have created the criminal justice industrial complex — and most recently, the immigration justice industrial complex. Without a doubt, the Church is being called to listen, with a new depth, to those words of the Lord, to act and demand penal reform and alternatives to imprisonment: “I was in prison, and you visited me.”

*Deacon Edgardo Farias is director of detention ministry for the Archdiocese of Miami.*

**Notes**

Renewal of certification: Here’s what you need to know

By Kathy Ponce

Are you due for a five-year renewal of your certification as a chaplain with NACC? Have you been postponing it? Dec. 31 is the deadline to apply for renewal this year without losing your certification or needing to request an extension (and pay the extension fee). You’ll receive your final reminder (of four) in November if you are due to renew.

Most of you know that revised “NACC Competencies and Qualifications” for initial certification and renewal have replaced the “NACC Standards and Qualifications” as of Jan. 1, 2017. The education report forms prior to 2017 are a bit different from the forms for 2017 and 2018. When you submit your record of 50 hours of continuing education per year, make sure you use the appropriate form for each year.

Carefully code each activity that you document on the report form — “A” for attended, “P” for presented, “M” for review of educational materials, or “V” for volunteer service to the NACC that has educational value for you. A minimum of five hours in each of the four categories on the form must be for events that you have attended. To record “A,” you must be present during the original presentation of a conference or other educational event — in person, online, or on the phone. If you were NOT present, the event must be recorded as “M.” Be sure to include at least 10 hours in each of the four categories on each year’s education report form. The remaining 10 hours for each year can be divided among the categories as you see fit.

Sometimes chaplains are puzzled about which educational activities fit into which category, because many activities can be appropriate for more than one. Use your discretion and discernment. It might help to look at the individual competencies (“standards” prior to 2017) in each category. If you served as both a presenter and an attendee at a particular educational activity, you could record the number of “P” hours separately from the “A” hours. Additionally, you can divide the hours you’ve acquired for a particular educational activity and include those hours under several categories. Make sure you clarify this by noting the total number of hours for the activity and how many hours you’re reporting in each category.

Many chaplains in remote areas have reported that they have difficulty attending 20 hours of continuing ed each year. Consequently, the NACC has steadily increased the number of webinars it sponsors, in addition to informing members about other presentations that members can actively participate in by phone or online. Participation in the hourlong networking calls listed in NACC Now also counts as attending a continuing education activity, as does attending educational events at your place of ministry — including continuing medical education lectures and grand rounds.

Certainly, everyone is familiar with listing books, articles, and presentations under “M,” but do you realize that many of the offerings on National Public Radio, such as TED talks, often cover psychology, sociology, ethics and can provide excellent educational information? Similarly, “On Being” (Krista Tippett) on public radio offers a variety of perspectives on religious and spiritual
issues. Public television also has on topics relevant to chaplain continuing education for ministry. The current guidelines for continuing education are included on the renewal of certification website,¹ but creativity in choosing educational materials is applauded and encouraged. Additionally, the Certification Commission would be interested in considering certified chaplains’ suggestions on their unique ways to accrue their “M” hours. (Please submit suggestions to any member of the Commission.²)

However … please remember that routine activities that are a part of professional ministry responsibilities (liturgical rites, patient visitation, CPE student mentoring, or training mandated by one’s employer) may NOT be submitted as continuing education activities.

The Certification Commission has also taken some steps to improve the peer review process. Because renewal of certification is a wonderful opportunity for chaplains to review carefully their educational activities, to reflect on career and life events in the past five years, to review their progress toward goals from their last certification, and to establish new goals for the next five years, all renewing chaplains should take care that their peer reviews are thorough. The Commission has refined the resources for peer reviewers, including suggesting that they thoroughly review applicants’ continuing education documentation.

A new opportunity in the past five years is that certified chaplains who are retired,³ and who meet certain criteria, can renew their certification without providing a peer review, a record of continuing education hours, or a renewal fee. Please click the link above to see if you qualify and to decide whether you might be interested.

The NACC website has detailed information⁴ on all aspects of certification renewal, but hopefully this helps to clarify some of the recent issues.

*Kathy Ponce, BCC, is a member of the Certification Commission and TITLE at INSTITUTION in CITY*

**Notes**

¹ www.nacc.org/certification/renewal-of-certification
² www.nacc.org/about-nacc/leadership/association-leadership/commissions-certification-standards-ethics/certification-commission
⁴ www.nacc.org/certification/renewal-of-certification