

‘A Pastoral Response to DACA’

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Angelina’s Story

Angelina is a young woman from Houston who was brought to this country by her parents when she was 4 years old. Now, as a 20 year-old, she is a recipient of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA. This means that Angelina qualified for a kind of administrative relief from deportation, and was granted a work permit, for two years at a time. With her work permit, she qualified for a drivers license. In order to secure her DACA status, Angelina had to pay \$495 and prove: that she was under 31 years of age in 2012; that she arrived in this country under the age of 15; and that she had never been convicted of a felony or serious misdemeanor (including a DUI). More troublingly, she had to reveal her physical address and that of her family.

Upon graduation from Lone Star Community College, Angelina began working toward a degree in accounting at the University of Houston -- on her parents’ dime, given that she does not qualify for federal or other government programs. While family is sacrificing to pay for her college, where she is thriving, with every month that advances the concern of “what’s next” lies in wait. Last September, the Trump administration formally ended DACA, leaving it to Congress to find a permanent solution.

If DACA is not salvaged in some form, Angelina will not be able to lawfully work -- even with an accounting degree. Recently, however, she was invited as a parish

leader of the youth choir to participate in a Spanish-language Leadership Training co-sponsored by CCHD and The Metropolitan Organization of Houston. After three days of study about the teachings of the Catholic Church and more, Angelina is now a more active leader at her parish. This year, she helped her church collect signatures asking Congress to support a solution for people like herself, part of an effort that resulted in 24,000 cards mailed to US Congressional Senators and Representatives of Houston. At a press conference calling on Congress to resolve the DACA crisis, Angelina proudly held up an envelope with the signatures she had collected.

“Junior” Garcia’s Story

Angelina is not alone. Consider the case of “Junior” Garcia. At the age of 15 he arrived from Mexico, ready to realize his version of the American Dream. He graduated from high school at the top of his class and went on to graduate from the University of North Texas with a BA in business administration and accounting. While lack of papers stalled his initial efforts to work, under DACA he was able to secure employment at a bank. He is now one of almost 700,000 DACA youth stuck in limbo.

After attending a CCHD-sponsored three-day training in Dallas, he began to understand his responsibility, with his church, to help shape the world around him. In advance of an accountability assembly hosted by Bishop Burns and Auxiliary Bishop Kelly, Junior helped organize 300 people from his parish to join almost 1,500 parishioners who carefully observed while representatives of the Catholic Church negotiated with Police Chiefs from Dallas, Carrollton and Farmers Branch for discretion so that their officers can accept a parish-issued ID.

Since then, Junior has helped organize Parish ID processing events at his church in which 700 parishioners registered with the church for the first time, and more than 300 received IDs that same day. He is part of the Dallas Area Interfaith citizenship team, which has identified 1,200 Legal Permanent Residents eligible to apply for citizenship, and connected them to Catholic Charities. Three months ago, his church hosted its first Citizenship Drive, with over 300 parishioners applying. He says it has only been one year since he first participated in the adult leadership formation class offered through the Church, but that he already feels a transformation has been taking place, both in himself and in his community.

Angelina and Junior exemplify the potential in our immigrant communities. Connected to religious institutions that take seriously their talents as immigrants, youth like Angelina and Junior are helping revitalize the Catholic Church, and, frankly, our nation. Angelina and Junior also represent a great tragedy -- not just in the limited trajectory of their personal lives should a solution to the DACA crisis not emerge, but also in what this issue has done to our country.

Nativism & the Challenge of Changing Hearts & Minds

Let us seriously consider the depth of nativist sentiment that has manifested in the last few years and the potential long-term consequences it has for our country and for the Church.

The revival of nativist sentiment is borne of anxiety, fear and insecurity, rendering people in a state of pre-politicalness in which they are more likely to make rigid, ideological and unreasoning decisions. This insecurity makes it difficult to engage

in the dialogue and deliberative conversation that is necessary for the Church to fully manifest itself.

Even while recognizing that immigration laws must be changed, we should remember that new legislation will not be enough to change the hearts and minds and habits and practices of ordinary people who have been infected by racist, nativist sentiment. There are obviously legal dimensions to the immigration issue, with all its permutations in the age of Trump, just as there were legal dimensions to segregation and voting rights during the Civil Rights movement, but the redemption that is necessary will not happen without sincere, genuine engagement that crosses lines of race, economics, ethnicity, and country of origin.

Let us not forget that the first nativists in this country were not Anglo-Americans. According to Simon Schama in *The American Future*, Mexican soldiers sent to Texas on regulatory missions reported that Anglos were unpromising “lazy people of vicious character,” overly fond of liquor and prone to letting black people slave for them while they got drunk in the heat. They were “ignorant of the language,” picked fights, ogled the women they later called whores and huddled together in rickety shacks in little shantytowns. Thus is our American heritage.

It is particularly frustrating to me that instead of engaging Mexico in a potentially much more productive relationship, we were already building barriers between our nations. Eight years before Trump first made mention of the wall, the United States was already spending \$7 million per mile for it. This is money that could have been spent to educate our children, build a first class workforce, strengthen our nation’s crumbling infrastructure, or provide healthcare to our most vulnerable.

I'd like to tell our current president what Ronald Reagan told Mikhail Gorbachev:
Mr. President – Tear down that wall!

From perhaps a less immediate viewpoint, our stance on immigration also affects who we are as a nation, and who we say we are. The story of our country is one of immigration and migration (both voluntary and involuntary), whether it's the story of immigrants from Europe or of settlers illegally migrating from the southeastern United States into the Tejas y Coahuila state of Mexico. (For a different perspective on the problem of illegal immigration between the U.S. and Mexico, you might find it amusing to read the chapter entitled "The Problem with Texas" in Timothy Henderson's book *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War with the United States*.) As Benjamin Friedman reminds us, when Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the 1830s, about one in ten Americans were foreign-born, nearly the same proportion as is foreign-born today.

If we deny the immigrant aspect of our story as a nation, we cut ourselves off from a large part of the energy and imagination which led to the promise of Democracy. To develop the story of America we created an institution to teach the habits and practices of a democratic culture – the public school. As far back as the 1830s free public education has been promoted as a "crucible of democracy, a blending of all children to function from a common set of values." Only if education is about teaching people – particularly young people – to understand other perspectives and points of view while maintaining the ability to debate and argue their own can we hope to sustain democracy in the face of the growing isolationism, cynicism and polarization not just in our own nation, but in the global community.

One recent outcome of nativist sentiment is a sheer refusal to cooperate on issues that require compromise. In 2010, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Republicans like Congressman Darrell Issa from Orange County promised to cooperate with then-President Obama on immigration if the Republicans gained control of House. Rush Limbaugh (and others on social media) attacked Congressman Issa for his willingness to cooperate until the Congressman appeared on Limbaugh's show to publicly make amends...and appease his base.

Since then, the national climate for immigrants has grown more perilous and capricious. While the new federal government ostensibly prioritized the deportation of immigrants with criminal records, the reality is that noncriminal long-time law-abiding immigrant parents have been caught in ICE roundups, with devastating impacts on families, neighborhoods and communities.

Adolfo Mejia's Story

Adolfo Mejia is one of thousands of recently detained immigrant parents. He had just dropped off his two eldest daughters at school when ICE picked him up because 25 years prior, when stopped by police for running a stop sign, he panicked and ran, evading arrest. In exchange for one year of community service, his 180-day sentence had been suspended and considered served, until this year. As the breadwinner for his family -- six US-born children and his Legal Permanent Resident wife Lucia -- his detention not only separated him from his loved ones, it threw his family into financial chaos as they struggled to pay for groceries without his income.¹

¹ ["US Citizen Kids Face Deportation of Their Immigrant Parents,"](#) *Dallas Morning News*, April 5, 2018.

His pending deportation illustrates the fragility of families in the absence of immigration reform. The inclusion of noncriminal adults in deportations not only tragically disrupts marriages, it traumatizes US-born children, causing long-term physical and emotional damage. Mass deportations also disrupt community-police relationships, particularly when local police departments are called in to support ICE operations. Changes in state law, like Senate Bill 4 in Texas which now allows local law enforcement officers to act as immigration agents worsen immigrant fears. Residents begin to fear law enforcement agencies and hesitate to report crime, contributing to declining public safety in poor and migrant neighborhoods.

The federal administration's recent challenge to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has additionally fractured public trust. Young adults, like Junior & Angelina, who had enjoyed a reprieve under the previous administration's executive order now find themselves used as political pawns. With plans for college and careers, these young adults (potential DREAMers) are now forced to decide whether to completely abandon their American lives and relocate to a country of origin they might not remember, or continue to live with the threat of deportation hanging over their (and their family's) heads.

Moderate Republican Response

One travesty is that even with clear support for DACA among moderate House Republicans, protection for these youth has not yet been achieved. There is overwhelming political and moral support for DACA because nearly everyone recognizes that the youth that came here as children are psychologically,

emotionally and politically Americans. According to a January 19th Pew Research poll, 74% of respondents favor granting permanent legal status to illegal immigrants brought to the US as children, a figure which includes 50% of respondents who identify as Republican or Republican leaning. To send them back to Mexico or Korea or Nigeria would be to put them in a situation of isolation and endangerment where, without pertinent language, customs or communities in which they are embedded, these young people would be a population at risk, without knowledge of whom to trust.

After the Trump administration formally ended DACA, leaving it to Congress to find a permanent solution, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sued the US government to permanently end the program, arguing that it represents federal overreach by the previous Obama administration. And to be explicitly clear, it is not without reason that the former president (Obama) earned the title “deporter in chief.” In fact, it is moderate Republicans who are leading the current charge to force a vote on this issue (discharge petition).

Public Charge

And DREAMers aren't the only targets. US Citizenship and Immigration Services has a category for individuals known as “public charge,” designating a person likely to become wholly dependent on the US government as inadmissible for long-term residency and citizenship. Leaked drafts of proposed changes to this definition reveal a substantial expansion of who might be considered a “public charge” to include immigrants whose US-born family members have (legally), and at any time, utilized public services including Medicaid, food stamps and tax credits. Should this rule change occur, mothers like Lucia Mejia would be forced to choose between utilizing legally available assistance for her US-born children

today or keeping the family history “clear” in the event of the possibility of legalizing her husband tomorrow.

Even recently legalized resident and naturalized citizens cannot afford to breathe easy. In January of 2018, the first de-naturalization of an immigrant was announced due to the discovery of missing digital fingerprints indicating previously unknown deportation records.

Immigrants and Institutions

That is not say that we should give up all hope. Immigrants are as important to the country, and to the economy, as to the Church because they bring energy, vitality and hope to the institutions in which they are embedded -- schools, parishes, health clinics and workplaces. Immigrants fervently believe in the American Dream. In fact, they have an irrational commitment to and belief in America, continuing to think that if they work hard and play by the rules, their children and grandchildren will have a chance to succeed. Immigrants are willing to make considerable sacrifices – working three jobs, 80 hours per week with the rest of their free time invested in church and school and raising children and grandchildren, foregoing entertainment and leisure to put whatever energy they have into raising their families.

Without immigrants, most of our institutions would collapse. Recognizing this, the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston has been on the forefront of efforts to prepare Spanish-speaking immigrants to more fully participate in their congregations and community. Last year, 80 leaders from six congregations participated in 3-day training the covered Catholic Social Teaching and institutional organizing. Soon after, those leaders put together a “Know Your Rights” session with the local

police and sheriff -- and over 1,400 parishioners. After the devastation of Hurricane Harvey, these leaders coordinated with Catholic Charities, Red Cross and FEMA to ensure that the needs of families were met. And, in order to pressure their Congressional representatives, leaders from these parishes signed up over 24,000 people in support of DACA.

Immigrants represent the future of the Church. And with the right investments in their education, formation and development, immigrants can help our churches thrive.

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Immigrants, the Economy, and Tolerance

As Amy Chua points out in her book *Day of Empire*, more than 95% of Americans today descend from someone who was an immigrant. Her thesis is that for all their differences, the one thing all successful world powers have had in common is an enormous pluralism and strategic tolerance for their time. She asserts that the rise of the US from a “ragtag colony to continental power to superpower and finally hyperpower” is a “direct product of America’s continuing ability to attract, reward and absorb the energy and ingenuity of vastly diverse groups. By accepting other countries’ pariahs, and later draining rival powers and developing nations of many of their best and brightest, the US generated unprecedented economic dynamism and technological innovation, which in turn gave rise to the greatest accumulation of wealth and the most fearsome military the world has ever seen.”

On occasion, immigrants help push this country to be more tolerant. Chua notes that in the context of widespread anti-Catholicism during the 1830s and 1840s, a group of citizens forming the Know-Nothing Party ran a presidential campaign on

an anti-Catholic platform in 1856. But within a generation – because ethnic Catholic immigrants organized themselves into an effective voting bloc – nativist party bosses found themselves spending significant time courting the same Irish, German and Scandinavian Catholics they resented, resulting in anti-discriminatory education and business reforms.

Benjamin Friedman reminds us in his book *The Moral Consequences of Economic Growth* that it was mainly during periods of economic expansion -- when citizens had reason to hope – that the country witnessed greater openness, tolerance and democracy. He believes that the rising intolerance and incivility in America's recent past has been, in significant part, a consequence of the stagnation of American middle-class living standards since the 1970s.

Friedman additionally reminds us that throughout history, slow economic growth in the United States has not made America less attractive to immigrants; the U.S. remains an economic, political and social magnet. Even while the most recent economic recession slowed the flow of unauthorized immigrants from Mexico, reducing net migration to less than zero[i], there are still populations, including unaccompanied minors from Central America, who continue to determinedly make their way here.

Without openness and tolerance, economies decline. According to historian Henry Kamen, Spain notoriously drove out its most talented immigrants during its imperial years -- stripping the homeland of its philosophers, scientists, poets and artists. In the words of a British observer, “their expulsion became almost an excuse for failure.”

Immigrants and Innovation

Thus the other part of our story as a nation of immigrants is innovation – multiple ways of looking at the same reality, and, as a result, finding useful ways of implementing new ideas, processes, and techniques. Innovators do not just discover or invent new things; they find creative ways to implement them. To the extent that a nation’s culture encourages innovation and building on new ideas, those ideas are not only sustained over time, but actually develop a cumulative impact. Fareed Zakaria refers to this concept as social learning in his book *The Post-American World*. In his analysis, the key to social learning is that discoveries once made are not forgotten or limited in use, but are refined and developed over time into further new innovations.

It was immigrants who brought the most advanced textile technology to the United States from Britain in the nineteenth century. More than two centuries of immigration later, an immigrant invented the world’s first commercially practical integrated circuit – the silicon semiconductor. Then other innovators, many of whom were also immigrants, took the concepts and ideas surrounding the silicon semiconductor and built an entirely new industry in the United States. This seems to me to be clearly an example of Zakaria’s social learning. Of the thousands of engineering and technology companies started in Silicon Valley in the last decade, 52.4% had at least one key founder who was an immigrant. Even when the National Foundation for American Policy narrowed their study to 87 privately-held American startups valued at \$1 billion or more, that statistic still held true. Furthermore, more than 71% of those companies employed immigrants in critical executive roles.[ii]

Immigrants bring new energy and innovation to the United States. They are tremendously entrepreneurial and willing to take risks. After all, they've undertaken enormous risk just to get here.

Pressures on the U.S./Mexico Border

Even while immigration between Mexico and the US has steadily fallen, resulting in a net outflow of migrants, we may soon see a future increase in pressure along the US-Mexico border. One reason for the recent surge of immigrants is pressure from Mexico to rid itself of public sector employees due to a Washington consensus that successfully pushed for the removal of agricultural subsidies and the reduction of public spending in education and healthcare.

On top of that, several US industries, like the meatpacking industry in Nebraska have been recruiting migrant workers for decades and continue to do so. Prior to 1965, and prior to the militarization of the border in 1994, these meatpacking workers would have worked seasonally -- traveling to Nebraska for a few months of hard labor and returning home to Mexico and their families. In the words of US Congressman Ron Kind of Wisconsin, "to build a wall now would be locking them in this country."²

Douglas Massey, a Princeton University researcher agrees, noting that changing US immigration policy transformed what was once a circular flow of male workers from Mexico into a settled population of families living in all 50 states, including 11 million undocumented people.³

² [Yes, We are Experiencing a Net Outflow of Immigrants](#), *Politifact*, April 16, 2017.

³ [How a 1965 Immigration Reform Created Illegal Immigration](#), *Washington Post*, September 25, 2015.

Immigration Myths

Contrary to popular lore, there is, almost literally, no line for Mexican immigrants to stand in. With the number of visas capped equally among all nations, smaller and more distant countries like Bangladesh are allowed an equally small number of permits as Mexico. Family-based petitions filed in one year do not get *acknowledged* for over ten years, let alone processed. Increased militarization of the border, and criminalization of crossing without papers, while hardly impacting the number of immigrants crossing over, changed the calculus of families deciding where to live. With border crossings increasingly dangerous (and expensive), hundreds of thousands of men have settled permanently in the US, bringing over their wives and children.

Even while the failure to reform immigration policy has created a moral, societal and political crisis in this country, it must be acknowledged that economically it has served as a boon. Under the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations, industries like agribusiness, hospitality, construction, food processing and elder care have grown to rely on cheap, immigrant labor. These industries, now at risk with a continued policy of deportation, are having trouble finding workers -- and are struggling to fulfill basic tasks without them including the harvesting of crops, the cleaning of hotels and the bathing of seniors. Without immigrants, these jobs cannot be filled.

Contrary to popular myth, recent immigrants are not in competition with native-born workers. Even if the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants were somehow miraculously located, detained and deported, the shock to the economy and day-to-day functioning of the market would be tremendous.

Operating on the assumption that every unemployed person in the United States would be in the right location, have the right skill set and the right frame of mind to replace deported workers, we would still come up short. As of April 2018 the Bureau of Labor Statistics recognized only 6.3 million unemployed workers actively seeking work, a drop of close to 2 million since the 2008 crash.^[vii] This number demonstrates that even now, we still need immigrants to fill essential jobs in our labor market.

A second myth that must be addressed is the notion that immigrants drive down wages for native-born workers. I have no quarrel with the claim that employers have been successful in reducing the real wages of workers, but those declines are largely due not to immigrants but to changes in technology and the rise of globalization. As Simon Head notes in *The New York Review of Books*, "...since 1995, the year when the "new economy" based on information technology began to take off, incomes have not kept up with productivity, and during the past five years the two have spectacularly diverged."^[v] He goes on to note that before the economic crash, between 1995 and 2006, productivity grew 340 percent more than real wages – 779 percent in the previous five years alone.^[vi] Lawrence Katz and Claudia Goldin note in *The Race Between Education and Technology*, that years of investment in open "public" schooling for residents were consistently followed by periods of economic growth and shared prosperity – prosperity in which productivity and wages grew hand in hand^[J3] .

[In fact, one of the reasons Social Security fell into trouble was that analysts projected that wages would grow on par with increases in worker productivity. Because wages stopped keeping up with productivity since the 1980s, a Social Security tax hike was passed to keep it intact. Americans are now living longer --

needing more day-to-day care in their old age -- and having fewer and fewer children to replace them. In fact, US fertility rates have dropped again for the second straight year, and the number of births in the US dropped to its lowest level in 30 years. We are currently below replacements levels (1.7 births per woman vs. the 2.1 needed).⁴ In both ways, the contributions of immigrants will prove essential to stabilizing our Social Security system.]

While it is generally agreed that immigrants contribute to some downward pressure on the wages of high-school dropouts, only 20% of the incidence is attributable to the availability of immigrant labor; the remaining 80% is directly related to the substitution of capital for labor. Studies also indicate that while immigrants lowered the wages of high-school dropouts by 1 percent, they increased the wages of workers who had graduated from high school (92 percent of the workforce) by as much as 3 to 4 percent.[viii]

A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute additionally indicates that immigrant-generated downward pressure on wages is largely reserved for *other* immigrants because their skills are more interchangeable, particularly if they do not learn English. Once other immigrants are factored in, the wages of native-born workers largely rose with immigration – even among those with less than a high school education.[ix]

Furthermore, by ensuring that children and elders are protected and cared for -- essential services that families need -- immigrants allows educated professionals to earn significantly more than they might otherwise. We must recognize that our

⁴ [“US Births Dip to a 30-Year Low, Fertility Sinks Further Below Replacement,” NPR](#), May 17, 2018.

current immigration policies are systemically undermining the competitive nature of our economy.

The fact that the competition for jobs held by undocumented immigrants largely impacts our most poorly educated segment of the native labor market would seem to indicate that a closer examination of our educational policies is in order. Surely one way to address the concern would be to ensure that fewer people dropout of high school, thereby reducing the pool of workers vulnerable to immigrant competition.

The question of education policy is central to the immigration debate from yet another angle. The United States economy is going to lose hundreds of thousands if not millions of its most highly-skilled workers to retirement over the next decade. If we expect to be able to meet the coming demand for a skilled workforce and continue our pace of economic growth as a nation, it is in our interest to invest in educating all our five year olds, regardless of whether or not their parents have papers.

The debate over immigration reform in the United States must be linked to a broader discussion about economic, education and trade policies. To consider the former in isolation from the latter is not only impractical, it denies the role that US policy-making has played to date in driving up the numbers of people immigrating to the United States outside the legal process.

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Immigration and Christianity

To cut ourselves off from the immigrant is to deny our history as a church in America. The early Catholic Church in America has a deep history of being on the forefront of immigrant integration efforts, and creating a legendary network of cradle-to-grave institutions in response to the demands and aspirations of immigrants, their children and their grandchildren. In fact, at the time of our nation's birth, Catholics represented only 1% of the US population and appeared destined to play a minor role in its history. Within 60 years, however, Catholics became the single strongest denomination -- in large part due to the efforts of women and institutions like the Hull House which welcomed and integrated immigrants into their new American communities.

To cut ourselves off from the immigrant or the stranger is also to cut ourselves off from the source of our own faith traditions. The story of the stranger comes out of the Exodus. In chapter 19 of Leviticus we are told:

You shall treat the alien 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 aliens in the Land of Egypt.

Pope Francis, in his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, says that, for a Christian, "the only proper attitude is to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters who have risked their lives to offer a future to their children. Can we not realize that this is exactly what Jesus demands of us, when he tells us that in welcoming the stranger we welcome him?" He argues that the church has traditionally been too focused on "bioethical questions", when "equally sacred... are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the

underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.”

We are seeing this shift in the Vatican reflected among judicatories as well. In a recent homily delivered in Las Vegas, Bishop George Thomas argues there are seven signposts for the Church: universal holiness, shared responsibility, the Eucharist, theology of connection, mercy, missionary discipleship, and communion theology. He went on to emphasize that he prefers “dialogue over diatribe, persuasion over polemic, [and] invitation over invective” in regards to how his diocese plans to tackle the issue of immigration. In the US Catholic Bishops’ pastoral statement, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* they point out that the Apostle Paul asserts “the absolute equality of all people before God”. This notion was enshrined in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 which established the First Principle that people have the right to migrate and sustain their lives and the lives of their families. And while the Second Principle states that a country has the right to regulate its border and control immigration, the Third Principle contends that a country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.⁵

A minister from the Methodist tradition once pointed out that the Exodus story is a critique of a nation that mistreats its immigrants. Exodus 1:12-14 states, “The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians began to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites...” First the Egyptians dreaded them; developed an extreme fear and apprehension of them – blaming them for the ills in the land. Second they worked them ‘ruthlessly – a 14th century English word which means to be unthinking and unfeeling in the treatment of another. Ruthless treatment

⁵ [“Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples”](#), USCCB, accessed 5/21/2018

was just a matter of the emotionless application of principle or law[J4] . In the case of Pharoah and the Egyptian society, it means to be hardhearted. But ‘ruthlessness’ goes further. It gives a people permission to be not only merciless, but also cruel on principle. The Israelites as workers were limited primarily to construction and field labor[J5] ...’

Israel’s very identity is of the Immigrant as Foundress. It is Ruth who says to Naomi: whither thou goest I will go; your people shall be my people; your God will be my God.

In the genealogy of Jesus in the Christian Gospel of Matthew there are four uppity women who are Strangers/Others: Ruth, an immigrant from Moab; Tamar, Judah’s daughter-in-law; Rahab, prostitute of Jericho; and Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite and an adulteress. All of these women are depicted as foreign, ‘other’ and/or disreputable to indicate the importance of disruption in the formation of Israel’s identity and the shaping of the Covenantal tradition.

Both Eucharistic and Covenantal communities presuppose the existence of a similar mixed multitude which draws us out of our narrow space – our Egypt – so that we are challenged to engage and understand the world of the Other. This engagement opens us to God’s spirit as we begin to practice the virtue of *hesed*, the ability to put oneself in the other person’s situation and embrace their context and their reality. In the absence of this practice, as Rabbi Lavey Derby put it, “Our disregard of Others reveals a disregard of Ourselves.”

In humanity there has always been an inclination to create monuments to one culture or one faith. The rise of anti-Semitism in Germany and Russia; the

Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States; the English-only movement today are examples.

But our faith traditions call us to reach out to the Stranger, to be able to befriend those who are other – not part of our tribe. God is not just a noun, but a verb. St. Thomas Aquinas taught that God is pure act. And Nicholas Lash reminds us that there is no distinction between what God is and what God does. The more we reflect God's divinity in our actions, the more human we become. If we are truly made in God's image, then we are called to act – to welcome the stranger, the other. According to Talmudic scholar and philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, our very self is only possible through the recognition of responsibility to the Other. We see ourselves in the face of the Other. It is perhaps for this reason that Pope Francis argues that “we cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods even as others look on from afar, living their entire life in abject poverty.”

Reweaving the Social Fabric

The difficulty is that we fear the Other. Even before the current round of nativism, the alienating and homogenizing effects of globalization and the dominant market culture had begun to isolate people from one another and their institutions, creating a new kind of tribalism.

The only way to combat this trend, to become more human through reflection and conversational reciprocity, is for institutions – and when I say institutions I mean particularly churches, synagogues, mosques and temples, as well as schools and other community institutions – for institutions to take action. Inside the safety of

our institutions we can learn to make ourselves calculatedly vulnerable to the Other in a way that is prudent rather than foolhardy, public rather than private, and is centered around the experiences of our families and communities.

The difficulty is that we don't really know how to do that. At best we only know how to make polite conversation, to chit chat. In my experience in organizing with the Industrial Areas Foundation, this is one of the hardest things to teach – how to have real conversations with one another. When we do congregational development almost inevitably one of the biggest topics, one of the most difficult issues, is to teach people how to have genuine conversations that include real listening and reflection. And for these conversations to be meaningful, they have to lead to action – because, as biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman wrote, insight never liberated anyone. When people learn to act collaboratively on issues they have identified as important to their families and neighborhoods, they come to see their interests as being connected to the interests of those they had thought of as Stranger or Other.

I think those of you who have worked with IAF organizations can testify – both to how difficult this work is, but also to how valuable it can be. If we don't equip the people in our congregations and other institutions with the tools to do something – to engage one another and take action – all our good intentions will lead nowhere.

Unfortunately, there will always be a group that is identified as the Outcast – whether its immigrants, African-Americans, Muslims, or whoever the next target is. And to the extent that we don't teach people to develop the habits, practices and capacities for genuine engagement, conversation and action we are not fulfilling the call of our faith traditions.

Again in the Christian Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, we read the words “I was a stranger and you took me in.” The phrase “to take in” comes from the Greek term *synago*, which means making someone a member of the community. In 1st Century Judaism the synagogue was the center of community life. It was not just a house of worship, but the place where all important decisions were made. One of the Hebrew synonyms for synagogue is *bet ha-kneset*, or house of assembly. Today the Knesset is the parliament of Israel. Thus to be taken into the synagogue community meant to be included in the center of political and economic life; it represented a commitment to a shared prosperity in which everyone participates.

Our democratic tradition teaches us that to be included in the center of political and economic life requires engagement in civil society and public debate. To my mind, both our democratic tradition and our faith traditions point us in the direction of theologian Robert Sokolowski. According to Sokolowski:

All discourse is in principle a matter of conversational reciprocity. Thinking in the medium of words is inherently public and so is human reason.

What I think Sokolowski is saying is that conversational reciprocity enables us to become more human. But that kind of reciprocity presupposes reflection, and the ability to be truly reflective is dependent on being in relationship with the Other – those who are not a part of our tribe.

Another theologian, David Tracey, reminds us in *Plurality and Ambiguity* that:

Conversation has some hard rules: say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the Other says, however different or Other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, and to change your mind if the evidence suggests it.

Or as Bernard Lonergan put it: Be attentive, be intelligent, be responsible, be loving, and, if necessary, change.

One of the roles of religious congregations in public life must be to teach people to have the conversations that build relationships which cross lines of race, class, ethnicity, economics, country of origin, and even religion. This is the reason we build our broad-based organizations with as much diversity as possible. Our organizations include congregations as well as secular institutions such as unions, schools, and community institutions. We actively seek to include predominantly African-American, Hispanic, Anglo, Asian institutions as well as those that are multi-ethnic in their own right. The organizations include people from both middle class and low income communities, and in some cases even relatively wealthy families and their institutions.

Now, when I first started organizing I thought about the work in terms of taking resources away from the greedy wealthy “haves” who had practically (and in some cases literally) stolen them, and getting those resources to the have-nots. But as the world has changed over the last 40 years, it has become clear to me that the work today has to be much more about reweaving the increasingly frayed fabric of society. And that fabric is frayed both inside and between wealthy neighborhoods

and institutions, poor neighborhoods and institutions, middle class neighborhoods and institutions, and both within and among ethnic, racial, and religious groups.

My work, the work of the Industrial Areas Foundation, has always been about organizing people around their interests rather than their fears, anxieties and prejudices. This has always been difficult, but it has never been a more daunting task than it seems today. In times of economic crisis people are even more likely to operate out of their fears and anxieties – and people who are fearful and anxious tend to start looking for scapegoats. We have to be out in front, ahead of the curve, working to teach people that not only is there no reason to fear those who are different – but to actively seek to engage the Other, to form relationships and move into collaborative action around their shared interests.

If you want people to engage fully in the life of their congregation, of their community, then you have to offer them something that leads toward worship, and enables worship, through God's grace, to comfort us in the acceptance of our vulnerabilities and creatureliness and to disrupt us to be more human, more engaged and more relational with both our neighbor and the Other.

Conclusion

Now with the help of people like yourselves, the leaders of the Texas IAF organizations have worked together to provide water and sewer services for hundreds of thousands of families who didn't have them, to build workforce development strategies for the 21st Century, and to dramatically improve the education and health care available for our children. Obviously we need to do much more in these troubled times, and that's why we need your help.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to be with you today, and I hope to be able to have many conversations with you about the future of our families and our communities.

Additional Notes

Discharge Petition & Queen of the Hill Process:

On May 9th, Representative Carlos Curbelo (R-FL) and other moderate Republicans filed what's known as a discharge petition on DACA. As of Monday May 21st, 20 Republicans have signed on. An obscure rule, the discharge petition allows a majority of members to force a vote in the House of Representatives. If all Democratic members throw their support behind the move, the signees would only need to pick up an additional **5** Republican signatures.

To be clear, one reason discharge petitions are so uncommon is that they rarely succeed. Between 1967 and 2003, only 22 of 221 discharge petitions made it to the floor. However, even if the discharge petition itself ultimately fails, it may help generate the momentum needed for further action.

If the discharge petition *does* acquire enough signatures, the measure may be voted on by a process known as "queen of the hill" in which three or more proposals will be fielded at once and voted on at once. The proposal with the most votes will be the legislation that passes.

Operation Janus

Operation Janus has no relation to the Supreme Court case, nor with employment verification records. Operation Janus⁶ is a Department of Homeland Security initiative (created under Obama) to identify how many immigrants perhaps should not have been legalized or naturalized, due to standing deportation orders. Because digital fingerprint files have not yet been completely centralized, some immigrants have slipped through the cracks of USCIS. After identifying 858 cases in which digital fingerprints were missing, and recommending that the ICE finish uploading digital fingerprints available to them, Operation Janus was wound down in early 2016. Under President Trump, however, Operation Janus has been rebooted to seek out opportunities to strip people of recently gained status. The first denaturalization occurred in January 2018.

US-Mexico Trade Policy, Migration and Border

⁶ ["USCIS Partners with Justice Department and Secures First Denaturalization As a Result of Janus,"](#) USCIS, January 10, 2018.

We have, however, created problems for ourselves in that the United States chose to pursue a trade agreement rather than a common market strategy.[J1] And as a part of that trade agreement, we insisted that Mexico eliminate its subsidies for growing corn and other agricultural products, so that American farmers would have a new export market while still maintaining government subsidies of their own. The conditions imposed on Mexico by the U.S. forced farmers into the cities to look for work, which in turn depressed wages in the urban areas at the same time that food prices were on the rise. It should come as no surprise that these pressures left many poor Mexican nationals with few options beyond seeking work across the border [old language -- still true, but dated].

Rather than focusing on reducing demand for drugs in the United States, our government has pressured Mexico to take on the drug cartels internally. And at the same time that our government is encouraging Mexico to pursue this war, both the U.S. and international financial institutions are pressuring the Mexicans to reduce government expenditures over all. An awful result of this is that the few important criminals who do get arrested don't get indicted, don't go to trial, don't get convicted, and don't go to jail. And if by some miracle they are forced through the judicial process and end up in prison, corruption in the prison system means they continue to run their trafficking networks from inside.

In the past people fled Mexico for the United States because of economic reasons. Today given the enormous increase in violent crime and drug use, people are at least as likely to be fleeing for their lives and the lives of their families.

We cannot deny that the economic relationship between the US and Mexico represents a great opportunity for development, but at the same time this increased interdependence of our economies also represents a great challenge for both countries. In our quest to increase the export market for U.S.-grown food and U.S.-made products, Mexico has become our third-largest export market and source of imports.[iii] Only trade with China, Canada (and all of the European Union) exceeds trade with Mexico.

Meanwhile, remittances from Mexicans working in the U.S. to their families in Mexico now exceed what the country earns from oil exports. In 2016, Mexico received \$27 billion in remittances -- a record high and much more than what the country received from oil exports, \$18.7 billion, according to Mexico's central bank.[iv] This impacts our financial institutions as well, both in terms of fees charged for the remittance transactions and in terms of the lines of credit many of our institutions have extended in Mexico and Latin America.

And the investments in infrastructure which were supposed to flow freely into Mexico with the reduction of the barriers to moving capital across borders never materialized, leaving NAFTA's promise for Mexico's economic growth unrealized.

Over the long run, it would be important for the United States to take a page out of our own experience in promoting the Marshall Plan and its ability to jump start the creation of the European Economic Union and the Strategic Investment Fund, which have transformed the economies of southern Europe and Ireland. These communities have become first world nations as a result, and are capable of competing successfully in the global economy.

When the European nations decided to link their economies more closely to one another, they deliberately chose a common market strategy rather than a trade agreement. They recognized the disparities between their various countries, and created a huge social investment fund to build up the infrastructure in poorer countries, as well as creating common labor standards. While the European Union's policy decisions have by no means completely eliminated economic tensions, or tensions related to immigration, they appear to represent a more practical approach than that of the United States to date[J2] .

Whatever lessons we can learn from our experiences with the Marshall Plan and the European Union, even in the short-run, the fate of Mexico has to be on our front burner, both economically and politically. We are at this point in history, inextricably linked.

After the most recent economic depression, two factors have stalled Mexican migration to the US: depression-related lack of job opportunities and increased middle-class education and job opportunities in Mexico.

Parish ID in Dallas vs. Houston:

The strategy around the parish is not included here since the focus is Houston -- however Liz informed me that there are talks with local enforcement about the possibility of doing something similar here. While there has been some pushback from conservative Catholic media on the Dallas effort, the Dallas Auxiliary Bishop has so far taken it in stride, saying that there wouldn't be pushback if they weren't doing something worthwhile. It is unclear what might be developed in Houston.

Story of Adolfo Mejia:

I included the story around Adolfo Mejia because it is the most well-developed and illustrative example I've seen from the network. However, I did not mention the fact that his deportation was stalled due to the intervention of his local pastor, Bishop Greg Kelly and Dallas Area Interfaith because I did not want to distract from the focus on Houston.

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- [i] Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana, "[More Mexicans Leaving Than Coming to the United States](#)," *PEW Research Center*, November 19, 2015.
- [ii] Majoo, Farhad, "[Why Silicon Valley Wouldn't Work Without Immigrants](#)," *New York Times*, 2/8/17.
- [iii] [Office of the US Trade Representative, "US-Mexico Trade Facts," 2016.](#)
- [iv] Harrup, Anthony, "[Remittances to Mexico Hit Record \\$27 Billion in 2016](#)," *Wall Street Journal*, 2/1/17.
- [v] Simon Head, "They're Micromanaging Your Every Move," *The New York Times Review of Books*, Volume 54, Number 13, August 16, 2007, p. 2.
- [vi] U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Average Hourly Earnings, 1982 Dollars, Production and Nonsupervisory Workers , 1995-2006; Major Sector Productivity and Costs Index: Output, All Persons, 1995-2006.
- [vii] "[Employment Situation](#)", *Employment Situation News Release, April 2018*, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, released May 4, 2018.
- [viii] Phillipe Legrain, p. 142.
- [ix] Heidi Shierholz, "Immigration and Wages: Methodological Advances Confirm Modest Gains for Native Workers," *Economic Policy Institute*, February 4, 2010.