News



A large caravan of migrants from Central America, trying to reach the U.S., walks along a road Oct. 21 in Tapachula, Mexico. (CNS photo/Reuters/Ueslei Marclino)



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When the caravan of migrants from Honduras reaches the US-Mexico border, it will test the truth of our American values and the credibility of our Catholic social justice teachings. The caravan started on October 13 in the crime ridden Honduran city of San Pedro Sula, and later migrants from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala joined them. Approximately 2,300 of them are children. Now there are three caravans. This third caravan is of mothers in search of their children who went missing in the process of migrating to the United States.

In light of the mission of the mothers, it is worth remembering the role of the current administration's policies and practices that add to the ranks of lost children. Lucila, a young single mother, came to our country without papers and at the detention center, in an act of unimaginable cruelty, officials violently ripped her six-month-old baby from her arms. She waited eight months before she was reunited with her baby. Imagine the torture of separation for this young mother.



Young migrant children, who are part of a caravan from Central America en route to the United States, bathe Nov. 1 at a makeshift camp in Matias Romero, Mexico. The U.N. children's agency estimates that 2,300 children were traveling in the caravan. (CNS photo/Reuters/Hannah McKay)

A young pregnant woman from Guatemala kept asking for medical assistance at a detention shelter, but each time was denied help. Her vulnerable baby was born with

complications and immediately taken to a local hospital and placed in intensive care. The mother was returned to the detention center in handcuffs. No child should have to begin life in such traumatic circumstances.

Months after a court order requiring the reunification of children with their families, hundreds of immigrant youth remain separated from their parents in US detention facilities.

Now the Pentagon is preparing to send over 5,200 active duty troops to the border to prevent the caravan from crossing into the United States. There are already over 2,000 Border Patrol agents and the same number of National Guard troops deployed at one of the most militarized borders in the world. With these accumulated forces, the border will have more troops than the U.S. military presence in Iraq. Unregulated armed militias are also planning to come to the border.

This week, border patrol agents in riot gear began exercise drills to prepare for the caravan. Some of my parishioners tell me that they voted for this president because he claims to be pro-life. Sending the United States military to scare innocent families with babies who are seeking a better life for their children is not pro-life. Dispatching the most powerful law enforcement and military force in the world to confront harmless immigrants struggling to survive is cruel, inhumane and evil.

During this mid-term election cycle, the White House and complicit politicians are demonizing and spreading lies about the caravan of refugees for political gain in order to appease a base already pre-disposed against immigrants. At political rallies mobs holler "build the wall," their rage fueled by anti-immigrant rhetoric. These politicians mischaracterize immigrants with their fearmongering, creating a toxic climate that stokes hate, xenophobia and racism. Even some in the media perpetuate the criminalization of migrants and refugees. Overwhelmingly, these immigrants are not criminals or terrorists, but they are regarded as indistinguishable and disposable.

Immigrants are made in the image and likeness of God and deserve to be treated with respect grounded in the dignity of our shared humanity. Words against immigrants matter, and hate speech has dangerous consequences. They stir the darkest forces of nativism, white supremacy and prejudice — often times masquerading as patriotism. The greater danger for our country is the normalization

of this hate, which reinforces an "us vs. them" mentality that further polarizes communities.

Immigrants are not the problem, and the caravan does not present a crisis or a national emergency. Root causes for contemporary responses deserve deeper exploration. Unjust and unequal trade agreements like NAFTA and CAFTA are detrimental to the survival of those who are impoverished. Decades of U.S. interventions in Central American countries supporting oppressive regimes and corrupt governments helped foster ongoing cycles of violence. Migrants and refugees flee their homelands in search of a sustainable life for their families beyond the reach of drug cartels, poverty and the negative effects of climate change.

In the U.S. we have to stop blaming immigrants for the social and economic problems of our own country. Our real crises are moral ones: the growing gap between the rich and the poor; wage theft from regular workers; politicians capitulating to wealthy corporations and lobbyists; scandalous bonuses and exorbitant pay for CEOs; the backdoor machinations of Wall Street; the amount of wealth it takes to run for elections.



A man protects his child after he and fellow migrants trying to reach the U.S. stormed a border checkpoint Oct. 19 in Ciudad Hidalgo, Mexico. (CNS photo/Reuters/Edgard Garrido)

Economists and several studies conclude that immigrants do not take jobs away from Americans, they create jobs. They contribute more to the economy than the government services they use. And they have the lowest crime rate in the nation. They are not a threat to our country, in fact they uphold treasured American values, appreciating hard work, freedom and economic opportunities. This is why the arrival of more immigrants should not be a cause for concern but a promise of a better United States of America.

From a Catholic perspective, this caravan is a modern-day migrant human rights movement. It is a wave of hope for our neighbors in hopeless situations. These migrants are challenging our U.S. Catholic communities to get out of our comfort and ideological zones, to ask profound questions about the impact of our lifestyles in relation to their sufferings. Answers come from our solidarity and option with and for the poorest and most vulnerable. These sisters and brothers of ours are asking us to see the world through their struggles, their fears and their dreams.



Honduran migrants who are part of a caravan trying to reach the U.S. rest in a shelter Oct. 18 in Tecun Uman, Guatemala. (CNS photo/Reuters/Edgard Garrido)

Our faith calls us to a solidarity that is not neutral to the plight of struggling immigrants, otherwise we allow the voices of hate to obstruct and dominate the stories of their hopes. The bonds of solidarity we preach expects us to enter their pain, listen deeply to their stories and embrace their dreams. Such solidarity becomes transformative in our own spiritual lives, inspiring us to see the world beyond oppression, pain, and suffering; encouraging us to believe in a future of compassion, mercy, kindness and justice; converting us from racism, xenophobia and violence.

In this solidarity we are able to recognize that the immigrants' search goes beyond achieving the American dream, but it is an invitation to participate in the building of the reign of God with openness to start anew in freedom, to care for the earth as sacred, to expand families without fear and to live in gratitude to God for a future filled with divine graces.



A migrant woman from El Salvador, part of a caravan traveling to the United States, prays during a stop Nov. 2 in Tecun Uman, Guatemala. (CNS photo/Reuters/Ueslei Marcelino)

These caravan journeys are almost mystical in their total trust in the presence of an accompanying God. These prophetic journeys call us to an active hope, to transform our love into political action for the common good of all, to seek just solutions to complex, transnational human struggles. We can march to legislative offices to promote comprehensive immigration reform. We can support efforts at developing just and functional US-Central American economic programs that begin by addressing the needs of the poor, of farmers, of women and of children.

But most importantly, we need to stand in solidarity with a movement of hope in and across the Americas that is affirming the rights of the marginalized and poor to take their *rightful* place in our diverse society. Our solidarity with caravans of migrants will show us that America can rise above smallness and be better. This solidarity celebrates that in all things hope wins.

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