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Las Posadas call to action

by Demetria Martinez



Deported migrant Nicolas Lazaro, 21, looks for a place to sleep Nov. 7 at the "Casa del Migrante," a Scalabrini-run shelter for migrants in Tijuana, Mexico. (CNS /David Maung)

Commentary

In the days leading up to Christmas in Latino communities throughout the hemisphere, re-enactments are held commemorating Mary and Joseph's search for shelter in Bethlehem -- a place for Jesus to be born. The tradition is called *Las Posadas*, which literally means "the inns" in Spanish. Each night, from Dec. 16 through Dec. 24, a man and woman, playing the roles of Mary and Joseph, go from house to house. At each home, they are turned away. Finally, the couple reaches a place, often a church, where they are allowed to enter. A celebration begins which includes such things as food, piñatas, prayers and songs.

For people of faith who are concerned about the plight of immigrants, this ancient ritual has become a call to action.

During the past week, faith groups around the country, including Albuquerque and Washington DC, have held candlelight vigils commemorating the plight of the Holy Family, who sought room at the inn and were turned away.

According to the New Mexico Faith Coalition for Immigrant Justice Web site, "We hope for leadership on compassionate immigration reform and a joyful celebration of accepting immigrants just as Maria and Jose were finally accepted." To get their message across, faith groups converged for a vigil at the White House Dec. 18, International Day of the Migrant.

"We want to be a moral voice" in the immigration debate, said Sayrah Namaste of the New Mexico Faith Coalition. She helped organize the posadas vigil here, with participants walking in procession to the offices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a branch of Homeland Security. The building is also the site of temporary detention cells for immigrants. "We want them to know that we care," said Namaste of those locked inside.

It's a message immigrants need to hear; mass deportations both in New Mexico and around the country have resulted in the breaking up of families, a travesty that has caught the attention of faith groups in a big way. Faith groups doing the Posadas vigils are affiliated with the New Sanctuary Movement (check out their great Web site, www.newsanctuarymovement.org)

The new movement is an outgrowth of the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s, when churches declared themselves as safe havens for Salvadorans and Guatemalans fleeing U.S.-backed dictatorships. Churches are involved in the new movement in various ways, from working for immigration reform to actually harboring families who face being broken up due to the deportation of one or more parent.

The New Sanctuary Movement pledge reads: "We stand together in our faith that everyone, regardless of national origin, has basic common rights, including but not limited to: 1) livelihood; 2) family unity; and 3) physical and emotional safety. We witness the violation of these rights under the current immigration policy, particularly in the separation of children from their parents due to unjust deportations, and in the exploitation of immigrant workers. We are deeply grieved by the violence done to families through immigration raids. We cannot in good conscience ignore such suffering and injustice."

The New Sanctuary Movement raises profound issues that require our attention not only at Christmas but beyond. Everywhere, Mary and Joseph are knocking on our doors, seeking a place for Jesus to be born. Are we listening? Is there room in the "posada" of our heart to say, "enter" and "How can I help?"

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