

**Catholic Relief Services
CRS Campus Connection
Migration Discussion Guides**

"Border Issues"

PURPOSE OF PROGRAM: To introduce participants to the issues surrounding U.S.-Mexico immigration border issues in light of Catholic Social Teaching and the "Strangers No Longer" pastoral letter.

FACILITATOR NOTE: Have a map of the U.S.-Mexico border available for the group to review.

GATHERING PRAYER:

All: Loving God, we thank you for bringing us together. Help us learn how to better to serve you and your people. Please bless our conversation, and grant us the gift of your wisdom.

In Christ's name we pray,
Amen

Reader 1: As we begin our discussion of current immigration issues surrounding the U.S.-Mexico border, it will be helpful for us to look at our own family's "stories of movement."

Questions:

- To your best knowledge, what is your family's history of living in the United States? Did your family migrate to the U.S.? If so from where and when?
- What factors do you think either pushed or pulled your family to come to the U.S.?
- Were the reasons economic, political, social...? Was your family forced, for example as a result of slavery?

(Using your map, become familiar with the United States and Mexico border.)

- Which U.S. and Mexican states are connected?

Reader 2: People Dying on Our Borders

Each summer for the past decade, as temperatures in the southwest reached their peak, several hundred migrants crossing the Arizona desert died along the U.S. southern border due to heat exposure, dehydration, and drowning. Since 1994, more than 2,500 migrants have died while attempting to enter the United States. Between 1994 and 2001, this signified a 1,000% increase along the Arizona border. The actual death toll is likely to be substantially higher, as many immigrants who die in the desert are never found or their deaths go unrecorded.

WHAT'S PUSHING PEOPLE TO THE UNITED STATES?

Reader 3: Economic Necessity

Current migration to the U.S. from Latin America is largely motivated by economic necessity. The last twenty years have been marked by economic and development models that have been unable to improve the situation of the poor in Latin America. In fact, these models are cited with actually increasing impoverishment in many sectors and countries. The restructuring of Latin American economies and the implementation of trade policies have negatively impacted the poor (particularly in rural areas), and have shown dramatic decreases in employment opportunities and wage levels. Today, Latin America is marked by the most inequitable income distribution in the world.

Reader 4: Unfair Trade

There is considerable concern that this situation will deteriorate further for the poor if trade agreements currently under negotiation (in Central America and the Andean regions in South America) do not address the needs of the most vulnerable. New agreements should also learn from the experience of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and its impact on poor/rural sectors and small businesses.

Reader 1: "Giving Up...and Heading North"

The following is a reflection from a CRS staff member working for the poor of Mexico:

"CRS efforts to help family farmers improve their incomes and living conditions in Mexico have been substantially limited by the impact of international trade policy. (For example) hundreds of thousands of family farmers throughout Mexico have been severely affected by the flood of cheap corn imports from the United States under the North American Free Trade Agreement. As a result, the price of corn in Mexico has been driven below the cost of production, leaving farmers with a crop literally not worth harvesting. The Mexican governments cuts to vital support subsidy programs for farmers has only made matters worse. After generations of farming corn, families are giving up, abandoning their farms and heading north."

Reader 2: Family Needs and Reunification

Immigrants who have become permanent residents or citizens have the right to petition for legal immigration status for their immediate family members (spouses, minor children). However, because of per-country limits, preference category limits and limits on the total number of visas available each year, waiting times for family reunification can extend for many years. A Mexican permanent resident in the U.S. who petitions today for his or her immediate family members must wait at least eight years or longer to reunite with family members legally-separating parents from children and husbands from wives for years.

Questions:

- Imagine you are a farmer living in Mexico. What would it take for you to decide to migrate to the United States?

Reader 3: U.S. Economic Factors

Recent studies indicate that immigrants were critical to our nations' economic growth during the 1990s. According to the Center for Labor Market studies at Northeastern University, "the U.S. economy would have stumbled in the past decade without the new arrivals, and most immigrants contribute more in taxes than they use in services". Industries throughout the country rely on migrant labor, much of it undocumented. Immigrant households pay over \$100 billion in direct taxes to U.S. federal, state and local governments while the U.S. Treasury Department predicts a shortfall of over 6 million works in the U.S. economy by 2008 without the arrival of immigrant labor.

Reader 4: U.S. Immigration Policy

From the mid-1990's to today, the U.S government has devoted ever-greater resources to migration enforcement activities, especially efforts to prevent undocumented immigrants from crossing into the United States along the southwest border with Mexico. Although government agencies have proclaimed these efforts a success, there is no evidence that the latest enforcement efforts actually have reduced undocumented immigration. The strategy at the border has primarily channeled immigrants into remote and dangerous areas, and the primary result has been a dramatic rise in the number of immigrants who die while attempting to cross the border.

Reader 1: "Prevention Through Deterrence"

U.S. border enforcement policy in the southwest is based on the principle of "prevention through deterrence", that is, elevating the risk of apprehension to a level so high that prospective undocumented entrants consider it futile to attempt to enter the U.S. illegally." The rationale underlying this strategy is that concentrating Border Patrol resources and agents in traditional border-crossing areas forces would-be migrants into more rural terrain, giving the Border Patrol a tactical advantage in apprehending them and thereby discouraging undocumented migration.

Reader 2: U.S. Border Operations

The "prevention" strategy was implemented first in 1993 with the initiation of Operation Hold the Line in El Paso, Texas. In 1994, Operation Gatekeeper was inaugurated in California, first in San Diego, and then expanded in 1998 to El Centro. In 1995, Operation Safeguard was implemented in Arizona, first in Nogales, then in 1999 in Douglas and Tucson as well. In 1997, Operation Rio Grande was instituted in McAllen and Laredo, Texas.

(Locate the Border Patrol operations on your map.)

Reader 3: REAL ID Act

As of April 1 2005, the U.S. Congress is also considering legislation (REAL ID Act) that among other concerns includes a provision to build additional fencing along the U.S./Mexico border, and even more disturbingly, to establish a provision under which the application of all laws (criminal, environmental, labor etc) in the area around the construction can be suspended.

Reader 4: "More Hazardous Routes"

Despite the mounting human and financial costs of the U.S. "prevention" strategy, there is no evidence of a corresponding decline in undocumented migration. According to an August 2001 report by the General Accounting Office (GAO), the "primary discernable effect of the strategy, based on INS' apprehension statistics, appears to be a shifting of the illegal alien traffic" from area to area. Instead of not attempting to enter the U.S., migrants are opting for more hazardous routes. A July 2002 study by the Public Policy Institute of California found that there is no "statistically significant relationship between the build-up and the probability of migration. Economic opportunities in the United States and Mexico have a stronger effect on migration than does the number of agents at the border."

Questions:

- What values are reflected in the current U.S. policy?
- What's at stake if the U.S. border policy continues on its current course?

Reader 1: Local Community Challenges

It must be recognized that U.S. Mexico Border communities are indeed experiencing a large scale movement of people in areas where the local infrastructure for basic services are hard pressed and often unable to respond adequately to the challenges created by this reality. These communities are confronting at a local level what are essentially national concerns, and the end result of national decision-making. This significant local stress on the area is producing on the one hand terrible responses such as vigilante groups and on the other, impressive local initiatives particularly of Catholic and ecumenical groups which work collaboratively at the local level and at a bi-national border level to meet the needs of migrants and the communities, both in the US and Mexico.

Reader 2: Border Patrol Presence

Other negative impacts of current policy on the US/Mexico border region include increasingly militarized border patrol presence in border communities, which has led to racial profiling, harassment, and abuse of US and Mexican citizens in those communities. On the Mexican side of the border region there is also increasing abuses (including threats, illegal searches and detentions, and even reports of torture) by Mexican security forces and police against both migrants and organizations that work with migrants.

Reader 3: Smuggling

One of the most disturbing impacts of the current situation is the increasing involvement of unscrupulous smuggling networks and more recent appearance of traffickers (for purposes of slavery/sexual exploitation). As legal options for migration are restricted and transit and border crossings have become more dangerous, the majority of migrants rely on migrant smugglers for some portion of their trip. Those categorized as smugglers have included everything from migrants who had simply made the journey before to those which are now much more prevalent, abusive and frequently connected to organized crime. These smugglers exact large fees and have been known to abandon, abuse and even kill the migrants who hire them.

Reader 4: Trafficking

Although the terms smuggling and trafficking are at times used interchangeably in the region, there is a necessary distinction with regard to the most egregious form of the movement of people, trafficking for the purpose of labor slavery or sexual exploitation. There are now international definitions to distinguish between smuggling/trafficking, but this distinction is often blurred in discussions of large migration flows, and particularly in the Americas, where there is a continuum of abusive practices towards migrants, what begins as migrant smuggling can end up with individuals being trafficked in the most literal sense of them.

Reader 1: Trafficking Children

A new aspect of this problem includes the vulnerability of unaccompanied immigrant children. Immigrant parents increasingly confront the difficulty and danger of crossing back and forth over borders, and some have entrusted their children to smugglers to bring them to the U.S. As a result, some of these children never make it to their destination and are believed to end up being trafficked for sexual exploitation en route.

Reader 2: Unity in Diversity

All of the challenges mentioned thus far in the discussion, are of serious concern to the Church. In [Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity](#), the U.S. Bishops attest to the hazardous border crossings migrants face and to their exploitation and abuse in transit, in border regions, and in the work place. While the bishops acknowledge the right of all nations to control their borders, they also call upon the governments to enact policies that address the root causes of migration and create safe, legal, and generous immigration policies.

Reader 3: National Security Concerns

The U.S. bishops also state that the need to address important national security concerns, cannot extinguish the need for a dignified and legal immigrations system. The events of September 11th, rather than diminishing those priorities, make them all the more urgent. Ensuring legal opportunities for immigrants to live and work in the U.S. would enhance national security by bringing people out of the shadows, and decrease the pressure, confrontations and life-threatening situation at the U.S. Mexico Border.

Reader 4: “The New Reality of Migration”

Based on all of these concerns and grounded in the Church’s teaching and commitment to migrants the U.S. and Mexican bishops advocate that, “all aspects of our immigration system, (including enforcement policies along the U.S. -Mexico border), should be scrutinized and reformed to reflect the new reality of migration in an increasingly globalized world”¹.

Questions:

- What is similar or different about the current issues facing immigrants from Latin America, than what your family experienced?
- Which pieces of information presented in this discussion guide do you feel would be most surprising to typical U.S. citizens?

Sending Forth Prayer

All: Creator God, as your spirit moves through us, may our hearts be opened to those who are affected by migration. In your loving name we pray...Amen.

To learn more about the issues raised in this discussion guide, visit the following web sites:

“For the Dignity of the Land, For the Dignity of Mexico”

By the Mexican Conference of Bishop’s Document

<http://www.ncrlc.com/US-Mex-statement04.html>

USCCB Joint Statement on United States-Central American Free Trade Agreement (US-CAFTA)

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/jointtradestatement.htm>

CRS Recommendations on Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)

http://www.catholicrelief.org/about_us/newsroom/publications/CAFTA.pdf

The CRS FAIR TRADE Program

<http://www.crsfairtrade.org>

“Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers”

By the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

<http://www.usccb.org/bishops/agricultural.htm>

CRS & USCCB Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty Home Page

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/>

This program has been developed by staff members of US Operations at Catholic Relief Services. Portions of the document were taken from, “U.S.-Mexico Border Enforcement” written by the Migration and Refugee Services of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/borback.htm>. For comments or questions, please contact Kevin Kostic at campus@catholicrelief.org.

¹*Congressional Testimony of Bishop Thomas Wenski, USCCB Committee on Migration, 2004*