

SOCIETY OF HELPERS

VOICES of Hope



Faith And Immigration

BRINGING HOPE TO THE HUMAN JOURNEY

Vol IV Issue II

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We are continually looking to improve our publication as well as for topics/themes

suggestions for future issues. We

encourage you to forward any

questions/comments or suggestions.

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Mending Wall
by Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines,
I tell him. He only says,
'Good fences make good neighbors'.
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors?
Isn't it Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself.
I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me~
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again,
'Good fences make good neighbors.'

Immigration: not a political issue, not just a morally right or wrong issue, but a question of love. How wide can I open my heart to welcome those in need?

Sr. Mary Ellen



As indicated in the inscription on the Statue of Liberty from a poem written by Emma Lazarus in 1883, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." The United States is a nation of immigrants, a nation that is made up of people seeking freedom from persecution, poverty, and oppression. The message reminds us that it is the entrance into liberty and freedom from oppression that is the promise of America – a land, a people and a way of life.



Most Americans find their roots in other countries. My father's family emigrated from Ireland during the great potato famine in the 1850s. My mother's family emigrated from Germany. As a child, I remember that my grandmother did not speak English, only German. We are an immigrant nation. We have become one nation from many peoples, a "melting pot."

In this issue of *Voices of Hope*, we have invited our contributors to explore the topic of immigration through the lens of faith. Sr. Teresa Sheehan leads us into our exploration of faith and immigration when she invites us to have a deeper perspective, which comes from faith. Immigration is taking place in many parts of our world. You will read of Sr. Geneviève Perret's work with immigrants in France and Sr. Josefa (Fefa) Basterra's work with immigrants in Mexico. Candy Lo and the Hernandez family each share their own journey of immigration from Hong Kong and Mexico. Delphine Bararwandika reflects on the economic impact of immigration while reflecting upon her own immigration and the immigration of her siblings from Eastern Africa to the Bronx. Dalia Bagdonas Rocotello combines both personal and professional reflections on immigration as she shares her own family's journey to the US and her work in the area of immigration at Catholic Charities in Chicago.

Carolyn Jaramillo, Susan Weissert and Ana Collado reflect on their experiences of working in the area of immigration with other communities of women religious, Carolyn with the Sisters of Loretto and Susan and Ana with the Dominican Sisters. Carolyn shares how the Loretto Sisters fulfill their mission "to work for justice and act for peace" by sponsoring experiential trips to the Southwest border to allow people to experience firsthand the plight of some of today's immigrants. Susan and Ana share with us how the Dominican Sisters seek to fulfill the Gospel directive to "welcome the stranger" through their health and family services to immigrants in the South Bronx area.

On our ongoing journey sharing the history of the Helpers in the US, we hear the story of their arrival in Chicago. Since our last issue of *Voices of Hope*, the Helpers in the US had a very special celebration. In this issue, Sr. Anna Maria Baldauf, SH shares about the celebration of her final vows. Finally, we include some reflection questions and some



recommended reading on the topic of immigration. We hope that you find the articles in this issue interesting and thought provoking as you reflect upon these personal stories and experiences of immigration and consider how immigration has touched your own lives.

Never Losing Faith

by Ramiro Hernandez, Sr.



The year was 1993 and all was well in the Hernandez-Alvarez household. We lived in Guadalajara, Jalisco in Mexico. I had a stable job that allowed us to live a very comfortable life, and in the center of our everyday lives was always our Catholic faith; a faith that my wife and I instilled on a daily basis to our then preteen boys - Miguel, 13, Ramiro Jr., 11, and David, 10. Like our parent's instilled in us, we inspired our faith as a primary part of our family living.

Months before I lost my job, I knew that times were getting tough and that I was costing my employer a hefty salary. I somewhat felt that my position was at risk when I was asked to train a younger individual that had just been hired. At first I thought of refusing to train this young newcomer, but then I thought of my sons and of the possibility that one day they may be a new trainee at a company. I then decided to train this young man the best way I could. Later that year, I was asked to scale down to an advisor position, which was on an as-needed-basis and was no longer as a salaried employee.

That moment changed everything in our lives. I started a few new businesses for additional income in which I used the equity from our home, but the people I had entrusted to run the administrations of my businesses were careless and not loyal. We lost a great sum on our investment. Months later, my advisor position had ended and I was left without a job. I tried endlessly to find another position, but at 40 years of age, it was difficult to be accepted back into a workforce that was over-saturated and underpaid. My wife, Eva, had dedicated her time solely to the raising of our three boys and, prior to our financial woes, did not have the need to work. We were then faced with very difficult challenges, as our financial obligations were becoming very difficult to meet. Eva and I would comfort each other with our faith in God, never losing our faith, but gaining strength and courage through it.



We knew that this phase in our lives was not a barricade, but just part of our journey where God had a purpose awaiting.

A niece that lived in Chicago stayed in contact with us, and in a phone call offered me a job where she was employed as a supervisor. Eva and I decided

not to uproot our family so suddenly. I would travel to the States first, to test if emigrating to the U.S. would be a good possibility. I began working as a custodian, cleaning offices and bathrooms. After my first day at work, I felt a sinking feeling of failure. I had come from a job that required a tie and traveling perks to cleaning offices and toilets. In that moment I thought of God, my faith, my family and I asked God that if he had put this test in front of me, he would give me the strength to move forward into a better place.

Never losing faith, I called my wife back in Mexico and let her know that I was working and that I would send money to make our payments. Months later, our family left everything that they had known and we reunited in Chicago. When we were together again, I felt such joy to see them and hug them again.

I had left Mexico in March of 1994. By May that year, the answer to our difficulties seemed to have fallen out of the heavens. The Sisters of the Society of Helpers helped us get situated in the States as a family, find employment for my wife Eva and, most of all, gave us the spiritual support to make it through the first months of transition for our family. Our sons had difficulties with the change of language and culture, but through prayer, faith, and the Sisters of the Society of Helpers aiding us, they were able to make it through. Our sons are now all professional, caring and generous men.

We thank the Lord for helping us not lose our faith in our difficult moments, and thank the Sisters of Society of Helpers for showing us the gratifying path of helping those in need. We are forever keeping the Sisters in our prayers and we are eternally grateful for the help they provided. We have learned from their generosity and now pass it on to those that come to us in need.

God bless The Sisters of the Society of Helpers,

Hernandez-Alvarez Family

**Ramiro's article was originally written in his native language of Spanish and was translated to English for this Voices of Hope publication.*



“My God is a God That Moves”

by Sr. Geneviève Perret, SH



In 1998, I began working in migrant ministry. After living for six years in Argentina and one year in Mexico, I wanted to deepen my experience of having been a stranger in another country and actualize this experience in France by encountering those who find themselves strangers in my own country. My desire went hand in hand with the attention given to the migrant problem by the Helper community in France. My province had participated in the ecumenical campaign, “Welcoming the Stranger,”

initiated in 1995 by the Council of Christian Churches in France. Also at this time, European Helpers were gathering from time to time for sessions focused on the topic of European Helpers and Immigration.

I see quite a few challenges in the ministry to migrants: to seek greater justice by welcoming in a human fashion those who must live in a country other than their own; experiencing different cultures in a situation where some are learning to live in a foreign land, while others need to learn how to live in their own country among a population with greater diversity; and for Christians, it also means responding to the “catholic,” or universal, vocation of the Church that allows the baptized to find their place amidst the diversity of origins and cultures.

Since 2009, I have been working in migrant ministry in the diocese of Lille, France, sent on this mission by our bishop and by my own France/Belgium province. Immigrants represent 5% of the total population in the northern region of France and come from various countries representing five continents. Some of them have refugee status, which was obtained after a long and difficult process during which time they lived in very precarious conditions. It is unknown how many people are undocumented and live in fear of being deported.



Shelters built by travelers to England

Particular to our region is the presence of people from Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, and other countries of the Middle East or Africa who try to reach England clandestinely by hiding in trucks that are crossing the English Channel. While awaiting the possibility of crossing, they survive on our shores as they are pursued by police. Even though certain French residents reject

them, their presence arouses a great deal of solidarity and outreach in the form of free meals and showers, free medicine, and the recharging of their cell phones. Meeting people who live in these situations makes known the faces of those who are forgotten in our day.

In this ministry, I also connect to other members of the Helper family who work with migrants in different countries. I am responsible for a small diocesan team of priests and laity that represents different cultures: French, Madagascan, Polish, and Vietnamese.

Together we aim to:

- Help Catholics from different origins to have the space in which they may express their faith in their own culture (Masses in different languages, formation meetings and celebrations) while finding their place in the local church.
- Pay special attention to the youth so that they may mature humanly and faith-wise in their two-fold culture (children of immigrants, students or young professionals).
- Support the faith of Christians who are committed to actions of solidarity with the immigrants, with those who seek asylum and also those who accompany Muslims. (Islam is the second largest religion in France and makes up 9% of the population.)
- Facilitate a greater consciousness on behalf of the faithful in the diocese of the migrant realities and the evangelical call to welcome the stranger.

Because my mission is mostly facilitation and coordination, I like to volunteer once a week with an association that helps those seeking asylum. At times, we also have asylum seekers spend a few nights in our Helper community.

My apostolic commitment has led me to reread the Bible in a different way with my brother and sister migrants. A few years ago, I participated in a meeting in which we invoked the book of Ruth. I said that it was very important to recognize that we are from a particular country and to love that country, while at the same time to be conscious that our ultimate destiny lies elsewhere, in the heavenly Jerusalem that will reassemble all peoples, whatever their origin. What I said profoundly touched a Rwandese mother who had shared with us how much she



Inter-Catholic communities mass



Inter-Catholic communities meeting

loved her country and how much it had cost her to leave her home and learn to live a new life in France. That day, I began to enter consciously into a “spirituality of migration,” and I have become more and more attentive to the images of itinerants that the Bible offers us.

In the Hebrew Bible, we see the nomad Abraham begin the journey with his family. We discover the astonishing migratory route of Joseph, his brothers

and his father to establish themselves in Egypt. We also meet the young Moses, a Hebrew in Pharaoh’s court who encounters the same challenge that many young people have today when they try to find their identity in the midst of two cultures. Then there is the story of the Exodus. It is on this journey fleeing oppression that the people of Israel receive the Covenant that forms them. Later on, there is the experience of the Exile and the difficult return. Even if there is question of settling down (for example, during the period of Kings), it is usually in the experiences of displacement that God reveals himself to his people.

And it is because of their identification with the condition of the stranger that God’s people are invited to love the stranger as themselves: “The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Lv.19.34).

The New Testament presents more itinerants. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus fleeing to Egypt might well be considered refugees according to Geneva’s International Convention. The Gospel invites us to follow a vagabond who has “nowhere to lay his head” (Mt. 8, 20; Lk.9, 58). When I think of the first propagators of the Christian faith on the shores of the Mediterranean, I recognize them also as refugees arriving in Antioch to flee persecution (Acts 11: 19-21). Without those refugees, I would not be a Christian today. In awe I exclaim, “My God is a God that moves!”

I wonder about my own relationship between rootedness and displacement. Stability is part of the human and spiritual experience. The Benedictines, for example, make a vow of stability, and in the Psalms we say: “The Lord is my rock.” To remain alive, our faith must let itself be shaken by the winds of our existence. If by their vow, the Benedictines remind



land that I will show you” (Gn. 12, 1).

**Sr. Geneviève’s article was originally written in her native language of French and was translated to English for this Voices of Hope publication.*

Sr. Geneviève Perret, SH, entered the Helper Congregation in France in 1977. After working for several years as a social worker in France, she spent several years in Mexico and Argentina from 1988 and 1995, where the mission of the Helper community was to live with and give pastoral accompaniment to people in poor areas, joining basic ecclesial communities when it was possible. She returned to France in 1996 and began working in Pastoral for Immigrants in 1998. Sr. Geneviève can be reached at gen.perret@yahoo.fr.

A Stranger No More

by Susan Weissert and Ana Collado



In our Judeo-Christian faith tradition, scriptures abound with stories of immigrant peoples and descriptions of a compassionate God who instructs us to “welcome the stranger.” Our catechism tells us that we are “made in God’s image and likeness;” therefore, compassion must be the undergirding of our lives and of U.S. immigration policy, both at the national and local level.

Here in the South Bronx, the Dominican Sisters Family Health Services works with immigrants from 20 countries, primarily from Africa and Latin America. With or without documents, immigrants are faced with economic, cultural, political and social challenges, frequently bringing with them untold and indescribable traumas. Our mission at Dominican Sisters is to offer the “stranger” compassion and support.



In our Infant-Toddler Parents Program, where mothers take classes while their children prepare to participate in the Head Start program at the same location, we work daily with 60 undocumented immigrant families. The members of these families are mainly from southern Mexico, most of whom have not entered high school, and all of whom are poor. Along with facing the usual complexities of a new culture, the English language and unfamiliar laws and mores, they bring with them the pain of leaving families behind with no chance of safely returning home to visit, the trauma of crossing the border and the stress of raising their citizen children in a context of anti-immigrant sentiment that could result in arrest and worse, deportation. If a parent is deported, the U.S. citizen children have a right to stay in the U.S. Estrella left her small village four years ago to follow her husband, Arturo, who had come to the U.S. two years earlier. They made the decision to cross the border after her father died, leaving her mother and eight younger sisters and brother behind in a tiny shack and with no income. They also left their two-year-old daughter,

Rosita Maria, with Estrella's mother thinking that within a year or two, they would be able to send for her.

When Estrella arrived in the U.S., she obtained very little work. Soon after, she found herself pregnant, and within three years she had two more children. So while her husband worked 12-hour days, she felt isolated, lonely and scared. A neighbor told her about our Infant-Toddler Parents program. Since then, Estrella has been a very active member of the program and her youngest son, Brandon, has thrived.

But Estrella's situation, as that of all mothers in the program, is still so difficult. While it is understood that they will send money back home to their families in Mexico, the limited income they receive barely suffices to pay the rent on the apartment they share with other families, as well as the costs for food, utilities, and clothing. The emo-



DSFHS Bronx building

tional drain on Estrella and Arturo is heightened by their personal family situation. When Estrella talks to Rosita on the phone, Rosita doesn't remember her, and Estrella feels that she has abandoned her daughter. When her mother was ill a couple of months ago, Estrella couldn't go to Mexico to visit and help out or else she risked leaving her sons behind, which could raise questions with officials, since there was no guarantee of a safe return to the U.S. Fear of losing their children or deportation keeps many immigrants from seeking medical care, reporting theft or assault to the police or applying for badly needed benefits.

How do we stand with "illegal" immigrants? On a local level, we offer educational programs and social services, teaching about their rights and how to live in this community. But there is more we can do: we can advocate in our parishes and communities, proud that the U.S. bishops have taken a clear stand on immigration reform (*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, 2003, reaffirmed in recent 2012 announcements) and certain that the God of Justice will stand with us. We believe that no person is "illegal" and that all of our sisters and brothers are also made "in the image and likeness" of God. "If a stranger dwell in your land, and abide among you...you shall love him as yourselves, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Leviticus 10:33-34)." Thus, our faith compels us to stand with our sister

If a stranger dwell in your land,

and abide among you...

you shall love him as yourselves,

for you were strangers in the land of

Egypt (Leviticus 10:33-34).

and brother immigrants, to leave our doors and hearts open to the immigrant, so that he or she is a “stranger” no more.



Ana Collado, originally from the Dominican Republic, has worked in the South Bronx as a community organizer. A licensed clinical social worker, she has been with the Dominican Sisters Family Health Service (DSFHS) for 20 years and is currently the South Bronx Special Projects Administrator. Susan Weissert has worked in Adult and Community Education in the US and Latin America. After 23 years as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner, she is currently the Director of the DSFHS Infant-Toddler Parents Program in the South Bronx. Ana and Susan can be reached at acollado@dsfhs.org.

Immigration is beneficial for the intellectual growth of both the immigrants and the natives. When I came to this country, I learned a lot from the teachers and students alike. The educational system here is different from the one back home, so I was able to improve myself academically and build on the knowledge I had learned back home. Additionally, immigrants have fresh new ideas and different experiences to offer to the American education system. Immigrants reduce intellectual gaps by helping Americans stay in contact with the rest of the world's innovations. Immigrants' experiences also help broaden and enrich the educational system by bringing in new talents and new ways to approach certain situations.

Moreover, immigration helps strengthen the economy. With the aging American population, the labor force needs young newcomers to contribute to the retirement of the older workers who are exiting the workforce. The larger the number of workers, the larger the gross domestic product will be. The more people you have in a country, the more people who will be spending money on housing, food, clothing, education and so on. Consequently, this will increase the quality of living.

The main issue of immigration is the resentment towards immigrants and illegal immigration. People have this fear of, “Who are these people and why are they coming to our country and taking over?” Some people have the sentiment that immigrants have taken their jobs and have worsened the economy. I have not encountered any resentment towards me nor any of my siblings.

Issues in Immigration

by Delphine Bararwandika



Since the beginning of human history, people have migrated to different territories in search of a better land in which they can settle. Coming to America, from Kenya where I was a refugee with my family, was a terrific experience; however, it was hard for me as I had to leave my family, my friends and my home. The adjustment has not been easy, but with the help of my loved ones I have been integrated into the culture and so far it has been a good experience.

Immigration is always a hard topic for a country. Throughout much of the history of the United States, immigration has been a key foundation of population growth and cultural revolution. Migration to America has increased, and thus, has positively affected America intellectually, religiously and economically. However, it is also hard for the immigrants who must overcome the language barrier and tough immigration laws.



*As good Christians,
we believe this world
is not our home,
but that we are just
passing through it
to get to our
heavenly Father.*

Au contraire, people have been nice and helpful. Also, illegal immigration poses a problem to the American people, and I believe it is very hard on them because there's the dilemma of whether they should deport or legalize those who have immigrated. Being that America is the "land of opportunity," one must ask if it is fair to deny others from achieving their own. On the other hand, if you give illegal immigrants the opportunity for legalization, will it send a message that anything goes in America?

Despite all the problems, as people of the Christian faith, we are obligated to love and care for our neighbors because our faith demands it. As good Christians, we believe this world is not our home, but that we are just passing through it to get to our heavenly Father. In a sense, we are all immigrants because we live in a foreign land. Also, we have to remember that Jesus at one point was an immigrant. Leviticus 19:33-34 tells us that, "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

Immigrants have many challenges. First, there is always a language barrier, especially for people who come from countries that don't speak English. When I came to this country, I spoke some English but it took me a little while to fully understand my teachers and my fellow students. Immigrants face tough immigration laws that do not allow them to fully flourish. Then there is culture shock. To have to learn a new culture is tough. For instance, in my

culture you don't stare in people's eyes especially those who are older than you. However, in America I have learned that it is very important to keep eye contact every time you engage in a conversation with someone.

All things considered, immigration in the United States is a very complex demographic phenomenon. It is both difficult for immigrants and Americans. Nevertheless, both learn from each other and both contribute to each other's development. America needs immigrants as much as the immigrants need America. The economic development relies on new people with "out of the box" ideas to grow entrepreneurially and contribute to the overall national growth. However, it is not easy for immigrants to get into this country, and when they do, they face tough regulations.

Delphine Bararwandika is Burundian, and emigrated to the U.S. from Kenya. She came to know the Helpers through Sr. Geraldine Finan, SH, who was working with her father in refugee camps in Tanzania. The Helpers offered Delphine and her siblings a place to live when they immigrated to attend college in the Bronx. She graduated from The College of Mount Saint Vincent last year with a Bachelor's of Art in Business Administration. Currently, she is preparing to go to graduate school to study economics. Delphine can be reached at mdelphy2003@yahoo.com.



The Transformational Power of Faith in Immigrants

by Dalia Bagdonas Rocotello



Immigrants are incredibly strong. The decision to leave family, and all that is familiar, takes great courage. The journey is not easy. For many, their faith is integral to building a new life in a foreign land. I have experienced this reality, both personally and professionally.

My parents emigrated from Venezuela to the U.S. in 1957. The both endured a number of trials growing up. Although my mother was born in Venezuela, she lived a part of her youth in Germany during World War II. My father, a Lithuanian, was forced to leave his family and the country that he loved due to the Russian occupation. He made his way to Venezuela where he met and married my mother.

My parents sacrificed to create a better life in the U.S. My mom left her parents and siblings; my dad worked two jobs to make ends meet. Their faith was strong. My mother, in particular, constantly reinforced to us children that it was God who brought her through her trials and that God would bring us through ours. Her faith was developed through her early years as a young immigrant in Germany and remained strong through her move to the U.S. and throughout her life in general.

I have worked with immigrants for most of the past twenty years. I have had the honor of walking people through the immigration process and in times of crisis. I have listened as they shared their stories of exploitation along their travels and have felt their heartbreak at being separated from their families back home. They, as my parents did, made a sacrifice so that their families could have a better life. And, many shared that it was God that carried them through their journey and God that lead them to us.

The church has been their one constant no matter where they were. The Catholic church of Chicago is an immigrant church. The traditions and



feasts celebrated in home countries continue to be celebrated here in the U.S. My dad attended Lithuanian Mass every Sunday. Thousands of Mexicans honor the Virgin of Guadalupe at El Cerrito in DesPlaines, Illinois. And every year, Italians process down the streets of Melrose Park, Illinois as they celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. Their witness of faith continues to revitalize mine.

Twenty-two years ago I spent six months living and working with the Society of Helpers in Mexico. While I knew my time in Mexico was limited, I still missed my family and friends very much. I found much consolation in prayer, with the sisters, and at the local church. Although the services may have been in another language, they were my one constant connection to

home while I was away. My experience with the Helpers was truly transformative. It began my journey into a broadened understanding of the role that the church serves to immigrants. The Helpers worked closely with migrant laborers. They opened their doors in hospitality and worked with a local priest to create a food co-op for the families. Their ministry represented our church putting faith in action. My time with them gave me greater insight into a different reality that helped me to grow in faith and motivated me to want to do more.

Since that initial experience, I have continued to witness our church in action - whether it be the Scalabrian Missioners in Mexico offering refuge to weary travelers from Central America on their dangerous journey to reach the U.S.; or Catholic Charities services that build immigrant families and equip them with the tools needed to thrive; or the Brothers and Sisters of Immigrants who pray the rosary outside a local immigration detention center every Friday morning; or the lay leaders involved in the pastoral care of migrants. Each of these actions reinforces a message of solidarity and hope to immigrants through faith.

Those who become involved in these initiatives cannot help but be moved and transformed through their experiences. Local residents who attend daily Mass at the migrant shelter in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico learn about the trials migrants face and

take action through volunteerism and support. Bus drivers transporting immigrants in detention now pause as the rosary is prayed at the detention center and allow pastoral ministers to visit with the detainees one last time before leaving.

*We welcome them
and walk with them
through their trials.*

*Together,
we learn from each other and
celebrate our faith.*

One of my roles, though my work with Catholic Charities in Chicago, is to coordinate a transnational service program in which, each semester, we host students from Iberoamericana University in Mexico City who volunteer in our programs with the goal of gaining a greater understanding of migration on this side of the border. These students provide direct service and have

Dalia Bagdonas Rocotello was born and raised in Chicago, IL. She currently resides in Berwyn, IL with her husband Bob. Dalia serves as the Director of Latino Affairs for Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago. She has been connected with the Helpers since 1989, both in Chicago and Mexico. Dalia can be reached at dbroc@aol.com.

Undocumented, Unafraid, Unapologetic

by Hugo Dominguez

I was only nine years old. I remember holding my tears when I was saying bye to my brother as I was getting ready to board the plane to the U.S. I remember thinking that we were only coming for two months, but little did I know I was going to become that kid who was made fun of at school for not speaking English.

opportunities to learn and share with Mexicans living in the Chicago area. They leave sensitized to a new reality and motivated to make a difference. Through their experience, a number of the students who were once distanced from faith leave renewed.

By putting our faith in action, we as church become the constant that immigrants seek. We become that connection to home and to family in a new way. We welcome them and walk with them through their trials. Together, we learn from each other and celebrate our faith. While far from perfect, we who put our faith into action take the small steps needed to enact change. The steps that we take in faith will allow us to be transformed and to transform others to be open to seeing and learning. Just as with our immigrant brothers and sisters, our faith will not only carry us through adversity, it will lead us and those around us to new life.

I am that child who was sent to a corner in the classroom to read a random book in Spanish while the other students participated in class. I can't even remember the name of the book because all that was in my head was wanting to be part of the group.

I am that kid who saw his dad helpless when grandpa died, and we couldn't go see him one last time because if we left the country, it would be almost impossible to come back. I remember seeing him trying to hide his sadness working night shifts and going to school during the day pursuing that better life for his family.

I am that high school student whose biggest obstacle when filling out a college application was that special nine-digit number and who didn't understand why he couldn't get financial aid for college like the rest of his classmates.

*I am that person that,
like all of us here,
deserves the freedom
to pursue his dreams.*

I am that young adult who when getting in the car to go to school, work, or simply to go grocery shopping, his hands get sweaty and his legs start shaking. I remember when I got pulled over in the suburbs, didn't have a license, the officer didn't believe it was me in my school ID, and I was taken down for booking. As they took my picture and fingerprints, I thought to myself, "I'm screwed! I am getting deported and can't believe that it was only for making a wrong left turn!" Luckily, I didn't get deported, but I remember this every time I'm behind the wheel.

I am that young adult who strives daily to continue his education, applying for as many scholarships as he can, hoping to get them and working two jobs with the fear of losing them because of not having a social security number.

I am a good student, I am a good son, I'm a good brother, I'm a good friend, I am a good human being! I am that person that, like all of us here, deserves the freedom to pursue his dreams. I define myself. My name is Hugo Dominguez. I am undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic!

This speech was given in Daley Plaza, downtown Chicago in 2012, by Hugo Dominguez, a college student, marimba player, volunteer who works with children, and a member of a parish immigration committee.

Finding the American Dream

by Candy Lo



My name is Candy and I'm 33 years old. I have a beautiful, healthy five-year-old daughter and a wonderful man who loves me unconditionally. Did I imagine my life would turn out like this when I was a child? Maybe, but I envisioned my future taking place in an entirely different country and culture, that's for sure. I was born in Hong Kong and my family moved to the U.S. when I was 11. Leaving the home you grew up in to move to a strange country is very scary. My aunt, who was a devoted Christian, used to always tell me that God has plans for each of us. As long as we have faith in Him, we would be

okay. My sister and I were terrified. I remember crying the first night I spent here. We didn't speak fluent English, and when we spoke, we had English accents, since Hong Kong was still a British colony at the time. Did I mention my parents are hearing impaired? We couldn't even ask them to translate so we could order a Happy Meal!

It was definitely difficult for my sister and me to adjust in the beginning, and I think my parents knew that, so they sent us to St. Barnabas instead of a public school. Our biggest concerns were how people would perceive us and how we would communicate. I had a hard time making friends in the two years I went to St. Barnabas, but the teachers were very understanding and patient with our language barrier. They helped me when I couldn't understand what was going on in class or how to do my homework. I attended church regularly, studied the Bible and sang hymns during Christmas assemblies. I had a sense of belonging when I went to church; no one cared how you dressed, what color you were or how badly you sang. I loved how serene and calm I felt there.

After I graduated St. Barnabas, I went to Maria High School. My theology teacher said, "There will be one Bible verse that you will always remember, even when you graduate." He told our class to remember, "God is love," (1 John 4:8). That verse helped establish the philosophy I still live by today. My high school experience helped me to realize the importance of sisterhood. Attending an all-girls Catholic high school gave me the opportunity to make friends for life. Also, I was far from the only immigrant. It was a diverse city school with a whole range of ethnicities and cultures. I felt like I belonged. I was the first Maria H.S. student to be chosen to lead the internship program and I began working

as a teller at Beverly Bank. In my junior year, I received a paid tuition scholarship to Iowa State University. Unfortunately, between having hearing impaired and immigrant parents who didn't understand the educational system, somehow that opportunity slipped past me. Although I was not able to take advantage of that gift, it remains an example of how America IS the land of opportunity. I still believe that missed chance may someday, somehow come back around, but this time I will know how to pursue it.

My father registered us as minors with the Immigration and Naturalization Service when we arrived. He filed a lot of paperwork and paid many fees in order for us to be here. Before we could become citizens, all of us had to remain in the U.S. for at least five years without arrests and pay our taxes. By the time I got the letter from the INS to swear in, I was already 19. I had to file again as an adult and pay another \$400, but I did what I had to do to become a U.S. citizen. Becoming a citizen was the ultimate goal for my family -- we wanted that sense of belonging. Being an American citizen is how I would identify myself first. America has lived up to my expectations in so many ways. I love the freedom of speech, which China does not have. But, I'm also disappointed that our system can be just as corrupt as other countries. Nevertheless, the American Dream came true for us. We grew up in an apartment the size of my living room. Now we can have a dog, a big yard, two cars...these are things we never dreamed of when we lived in Hong Kong. We still have the same challenges as everyone else, like finding the right jobs and dealing with other financial problems. But, we have faith in God that He will get us through this and we are grateful for what we have.

Candy Lo is an artist and Chinatown enthusiast who lives with her family in the Chicago suburbs. She can be reached at perfectlycan@yahoo.com.

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Learning at the Border

by Carolyn Jaramillo



Believing in experiential education, the Sisters of Loretto Community has sponsored a trip to the Southwest border every year for the last six years. This trip is just one experience Loretto provides to enable members to better fulfill their mission "to work for justice and act for peace." I have been privileged to participate in these trips to El Paso, Tucson, Nogales, Naco, and Agua Prieta and have had my eyes opened and my heart touched.

Nothing has motivated me more to work for comprehensive immigration reform than these trips. I have met men, women, and children who had been deported after making a dangerous trip through the desert. Washing and bandaging their blistered feet, listening to their stories, and seeing the tears in their eyes has made this pressing issue very real to me.

Advocates at BorderLinks and Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson opened my eyes with analyses of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). They connected the dots by explaining how U.S. policies caused unemployment in Latin American countries. These "Free Trade" acts have had a devastating impact on Latin America's economies and have forced millions to migrate north in search of jobs. One provision of NAFTA strictly limits the Mexican government's subsidies to Mexican farmers while allowing the U.S. government to subsidize U.S. farmers at a much higher level. This unfair level of government support has enabled corn to be sold at prices 30% below Mexico's cost of production.

Other eye-opening experiences came from meeting with the devoted activists of "No More Deaths" who took us across the border to migrant stations in Naco and Nogales, Mexico. Their work with deported migrants and border patrol agents compelled them to publish "A Culture of Cruelty," a well-documented report of abuse in short term detention centers.

My heart was touched many times as I listened to the stories of the people at the migrant shelters. Maria's story was particularly sad, but not totally unique. "Maria" is a feisty woman who had lived in a southern U.S. city for twenty years. During that time, she raised three daughters and owned a small bakery. Neither she nor her daughters ever had any "trouble with the law." When Maria received news that her younger brother living in Mexico had been severely in-

jured in an auto accident, she went to see him. After his death, she reentered the U.S. illegally at Nogales. After enduring many terrible experiences trying to reunite with her U.S. born children, she was apprehended by the border patrol and deported. When I asked her if she would try again to reenter, she replied, "Of course, I have to be with my children. I will try as many times as it takes."

Loretto is once again preparing another Border Experience, and this time, we will learn from the immigrants and the dedicated advocates of the El Paso/Juarez area. We look forward to All Souls Day when we will celebrate Mass at the Fence with a Eucharistic community separated by an unwanted fence. We will pray, and hope to be inspired to work for the day our Congress will put a gate in that fence that will lead to a humane path to citizenship, worker justice, and family reunification for all like Maria.

Carolyn Jaramillo, a retired public school teacher and active co-member of the Loretto Community, lives in Pacifica, CA. She met the Helpers in 1980 when she joined a Peace and Justice Committee started by Sister Laetitia Bordes, SH. Sr. Laetitia introduced her to the community of Helpers at Lincoln Way in San Francisco where she enjoyed many good conversations and celebrations. Carolyn can be reached at cderby37@gmail.com

The Cycle of Violence in Immigration

by Sr. Fefa Martínez Basterra, SH

*"In a poem I will paint you the cycle of existence:
to sin, do penance and then start again."*

- R. de Campoamor



Applying this verse from a poem by Campoamor to the reality of the Central American emigrant in transit in Mexico to the United States,

one could say that the wheel is: "To dream, to suffer in penance and then start again."

The starting point for the emigration of Central Americans is the oppression and lack of opportunities in their home countries, along with the movement of a group of Hondurans who cry out in protest against the insensitivity of their government. In this, we recognize the more popular motive: "We are human beings. We do not emigrate for pleasure nor fun. We emigrate because all hopes for us and for our families are finished in Honduras. All we seek is work, respect and a decent life, exactly what our country has denied us."



The latest and most utilized routes

Those of us who have not lived the emigrant experience generally lack the sensitivity to understand what it means to make the decision to undertake this journey. It is also a challenge to understand why the “American Dream” is held so strongly by them, a dream which is almost always fed by positive experiences depicted by others who came before them, the pioneers. Because, from afar, immigrants, in their aspirations of dignity and success, tell their relatives and friends more about their achievements than their sufferings. Similarly, on their occasional return home, they attempt to project an image of success. However, the reality of their experience may be quite different as they face many challenges on their way to their new home.

In addition to their economic insecurity and lack of opportunities, upon their departure, Central Ameri-

can emigrants generally face a total absence of adequate information about the countries they will travel through. As is the case with those who emigrate through Mexico and its immense territory compared to that of their countries of origin, where the lack of information in important items such as legal requirements, geography, mores, and sociopolitical situation, provides a challenge for a secure planning of their journey across borders. The lack of information allows them to discover and suffer their penance day-to-day in their pilgrimage as undocumented individuals through a passage that they have come to know as the “Mexican hell.”

The suffering of this hell is played out in several instances as with the abuse suffered in the boat crossings across the border river of the Suchiate, and the waiting for and

difficulty in climbing onto La Bestia, or The Beast, a freight train that emigrants are known to ride to facilitate their trek across Mexican territory. It is a ride that typically puts individuals’ lives at risk of fatal falls and limb mutilation. Such was the case experienced by Marcos Guardado, a Salvadoran teenager. And there are other more terrible hardships, the product of extortion, corruption, human trafficking, kidnappings, sexual abuse and rape as daily aberrations that have made of the emigrants an easy economic resource, in the face of the complacency and profiting by authorities and mafia gangs.

In a cold and humid climate different to that of their own country, along with illness, lack of sleep, fatigue, and hunger, there exists a permanent suffering that at times may be tempered by the attention received in the shelters and soup kitchens, a total of about 53 along the way. These centers are for the most part set up by the Pastoral de Movilidad Humana of the Catholic Church and are staffed by volunteers. However, this assistance is occasionally marred by discrimination and xenophobia of the local poli-



La Bestia



Traveling on La Bestia

ticians. In addition, the police and the townspeople who live close to the shelters often threaten and penalize those who help out eventually causing the closing of many, such as the recent case of Lechería, a shelter in Mexico State.

Finally, there is the truncated goal due to the imprisonment and so called “securing”, which is carried out by the Mexican Federal Police and the Institute for Immigration. This securing affects approximately 55% of those who attempt to get through. Detained immigrants are confined in immigration detention facilities, which are essentially jails where individuals are kept for an indeterminate amount of time before they are returned to their homeland. And if by chance some immigrants do make it to the United States border (and not more than 15% do), they are vulnerable to the swin-



Kitchen at San Jose shelter in Huehuetoca

Central American emigration is one of the more dramatic movements of the “current unjust order” of our world that offers no possibilities of life and victimizes the majorities. Because of this, it must also bring us to reflect on our own practices and our being as Christians in this world. It is a new invitation to the spirituality of a humble and brave welcoming. It is also an invitation to feel the life around us and stop responding with an “I don’t know,” or an “It doesn’t concern me,” to the question that the Lord asked of Cain: “Where is your brother?” it is an invitation that instead calls us to respond as fraternal and creative guardians of our emigrant brothers and sisters.

dling of ‘coyotes.’ A coyote is one who facilitates the risky but possible crossing of illegal immigrants across the border, a crossing that only becomes easier when the need for temporary workers or harvesting allow it. Yet, it is these same immigrants that will be abandoned and without protection when there is no demand for their labor, thus facilitating their apprehension and deportation, leaving them back where they started.

A great amount of hope and fortitude is needed to cut ties with the past and assume a new beginning in their personal and family history. Since the “dream” is stronger than the painful reality, they start again. The great majority of them make three or four attempts, to attain their victory over discrimination and racism, and over skepticism about a decent future. And that’s how it becomes in them the flesh of their flesh, as is written in Quohelth 7:8:

*“The end of a resolution is better than its beginning,
patience is better than proud
hopelessness”*



Telephone service at San Jose

**Sr. Fefa’s article was originally written in her native language of Spanish and was translated to English for this Voices of Hope publication.*

María Josefa Martínez Basterra, Sister of the Society of Helpers of the Holy Souls of Purgatory, is of Spanish nationality. From 1975 to 1978, she worked in Spain in the Pastoral Care of Migrants, traveling to Germany, France, and within Spain, doing the same work that the Spanish temporary migrant workers did in the fields and fruit preserve factories. She spent seven years as a social worker in public administration. In October of 1987, she went to Nicaragua to work with the campesinos on their productive economic development. She tended the emigration of Nicaraguan migrants to Costa Rica. Since June of 2009, she has been the Provincial for Latin America, living in Mexico, DF, and since July of 2012, she has been collaborating with the shelter Casa Albergue de Lechería, currently in Huehuetoca and in the care of Central American emigrants who are in transit on their way to the United States. Sr. Fefa can be reached at fefaba@yahoo.com.



Breakfast Prayer at Lechería

Becoming Who We Really Are

by Sr. Teresa Sheehan, SH



We live in a world of seemingly growing divisions. Anders Behring Breivik in Norway is on trial for the deaths of many young people who favored “Multiculturalism.” In fear that Islamic culture would destroy the “purity” of Scandinavian (and European) traditions, he opposed its entrance into his country.

The same situation exists in the United States. Border walls are being built and fortified, immigrants are stopped and searched in some states, families are separated, etc. Surely we want legal immigrants, but many of the fleeing people cannot afford the fee application for legal immigration. There is fear that immigrants will take jobs needed by our own citizens. Yet large farm owners and others clamor for the back-breaking work that immigrants provide, and citizens decline to take.

The Wall Street “occupiers” rallied around the cry of the 99%; our Church encourages the preferential option for the poor in all that we do. The fact of an experienced pluralism is with us; technology has brought the whole world into our homes. Globalization is the reality. How do we remain “who we are” and at the same time welcome the new and different?

A deeper perspective is required, and it comes from faith. God IS the Father and Creator of all. We are all related; we are brothers and sisters. We are called to love one another, forgive one another, help one another, and do so even when we are not loved in return. Through such action, Jesus has saved us all and continues to do so. He asks us to share in all this with him.

You are invited to join in praying the Prayer for Justice with your family and/or friends each day. Our bishops composed it for immigrants, but it is important for all to pray and reflect upon. Thank You!

The Prayer for Justice

Come, O Holy Spirit, come, open us to the wonder, beauty and dignity of the diversity found in each culture, in each face, and in each experience we have of the "other" among us.

Come, fill us with the generosity as we are challenged to let go and allow others to share with us the goods and beauty of earth.

Come, heal the divisions that keep us from seeing the face of Christ in all men, women and children.

Come, free us to stand with and for those who must leave their own lands in order to find work, security and welcome in a new land, one that has enough to share.

Come, bring us understanding, inspiration, wisdom, and the courage needed to embrace change and stay on the journey.

Come, O Holy Spirit, show us the way.

-USA Bishops Conference



At Home on the Journey: A Reflection on the Road to Final Vows



My name is Anna Maria Baldauf, SH, and I am a member of the Society of Helpers. I am very happy to share with you that I celebrated my final vows on July 22, 2012 in Chicago. I am filled with joy to continue my journey with the Helpers. With much gratitude, I am holding in my heart my longing and all the experiences that led me to this moment in my life.

Since I entered my community in Switzerland in 2003, my journey in religious life has been joyous and exciting, and also hard and humbling. I have tried to follow my call to "choose life" and to "follow Jesus Christ" in all my actions and endeavors. These formative years have been a journey of deepening my spirituality, trying to live community life with authenticity, and being present to the people in my ministry and in my life. Step by step, I have learned to integrate spirituality, community life, and ministry in a positive way. In time, I have begun to cherish the holistic way of being united with God in a sisterly community for the mission.

My relationship to God was the source of all life, joys and struggles, excitements and challenges. I experienced personal growth, inner freedom, joy, and challenge through my formation and journey to my final vows. God's presence in my life helps me to become a more compassionate and loving woman.

In the last several years, I have deeply experienced my love for the Society of Helpers. I love the internationality of our congregation, the Helper charism, the challenge to practice contemplation in action, the variety of community settings, and our openness to diverse ministries. My experiences of community life were marked by internationality and flexibility, and I discovered that I deeply desire to live in community. I am grateful for many life-giving, joyous, supportive, and playful hours with my sisters. I do not regret all the challenging and even painful moments because these were essential to contemplate and discern my future life.

I deeply appreciate our apostolic mission to be a giving and loving woman in service of all people and especially to the people who I am encountering in my mission and friendships. I desire to "help in all manner of good" (Constitutions #27) and to "give priority to those who are forgotten, those who are wounded in their human dignity



and those who are in greatest need of hearing the Good News" (Constitutions #29). I would like to continue to establish compassionate and loving relationships "so that the absolute value of every human being, especially the poor and the neediest, be recognized" (Constitutions #25). Sometimes it happens that people in my ministry thank me that I am a woman religious and that I commit my professional skills to the life of the Church. It touches me that my desire to be a Helper and to live a life in a non-traditional way can transform and heal some of people's life experiences.

In all these years of initiation to religious life, I discovered my strength and relational limitations. Most of all, I learned that "the world can not be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey, a journey of one inch...very humbling and joyful, by which [I] arrive at the ground at [my] feet, and learn to be at home" (Wendell Berry in *The Artist Rule*).

Helper History: The Helpers Come to Chicago

by Sr. Dominga Zapata, SH



1st Convent in Chicago
Sacred Heart Parish

Father James O'Neil, S.J. As had happened with other foundations, one quarter of their possessions were stolen before they even moved to their first house. Yet, Providence was always there to provide. The Helpers arrived and continue to be a presence, at the center of the Chicago's ethnic and cultural diversity.

The reality of the immigrant community offered the Helpers their first sign of priority: "Instruct the people, instruct the children." The request to care for the sick also arrived at their door; an open door for the African Americans, the Club Room for dress-making, music lessons, collaboration of the Associates (friends), retreats and later even for boys to play. Their convent soon became the "home" of the neighborhood, especially for children.

The "Roaring Twenties" was an era of great change that preceded the Great Depression and had a tremendous impact on the United States. Chicago was no exception. August 7th, 1925 marked the official foundation of the Helpers in Chicago at the request of



Early sisters in Chicago

The big event was the Eucharistic Congress, June 20-24, 1926. Again, the Helpers' house became a home for the many friends from all over the United States and many parts of the world who attended the Congress. With no concelebrations at that time, the Helpers had several Masses each day. Even a delegate of the Pope came to visit them.

Two years after the foundation, the Helpers moved to another location in order to make their home a place where all would be welcomed. The new Chapel would sit more than 650 people and during the Novena for the Holy Souls, extra chairs were needed. The new place became a center of evangelization and conversion. The visits to the sick at their homes and at Cook County Hospital were also fruitful in conversions and instrumental in aiding family reconciliations. Each year, more parishes were added to their missionary ministry: Helpers' Clubs flourished and multiplied, including summer schools at various parks for more than 1,000 children. Some of these, characteristically of the Helpers, were handed over to others to continue.

Another sign of Divine Providence let the Helpers to move again. Catholics had moved from their neighborhood and so must the Helpers! This time they did not move to a sacred place, but rather to a gambling place. In 1945, the Helpers found their home at 303 W. Barry Avenue, previously Al Capone's place of business! After obtaining the lot next to their property, the Helpers set a fire to get rid of the furniture and garbage left behind. One of the Helpers instructed the firemen not to put the fire out and, as a reward, she gave them hot coffee and doughnuts. From here, the Helpers extended themselves to ministry among African Americans. They taught Archdiocesan seminarians how to teach these children about God. Years later, as priests, they were grateful the experience in their priestly formations and, in 1975, one of them celebrated the Mass for the 50th anniversary of the Helpers arrival in Chicago.



The Helpers brought something different to Chicago in their home ministries. They supplied education for those in need. They provided recreational opportunities for area youth. They searched out people in state and county institutions, and took care of the sick in their own homes and aided those impacted by their family members' suffering. They made themselves available to the needs of the suffering and the poor, whomever they may be.

The ministry of the Helpers in Chicago reached beyond measures, then as it does today, through a variety of channels. From Lent and Advent Days of Recollection, Mothers' Clubs, Little Mary Girls' Clubs, Special Re-

ligious Education, Catholic Charities and Archdiocesan Offices ministries to youth and family ministry, parish religious and liturgy coordinators, Hispanic Ministry, care of the sick at their homes, spiritual accompaniment, psychological therapy, daily home chores and contemplative prayer, all of these spread through Charity, as requested by our Foundress Blessed Mary of Providence, Marie Eugenie Smet.

"Our mission enables us to discover the face and the action of God in the world. It leads us to participate in God's work of salvation by working toward the integral liberation of all who suffer from injustice and from sin." (Decree of Orientation, 1978)

Recommended Reading

A Culture of Cruelty – No More Deaths

http://www.cultureofcruelty.org/documents/2011_report/

A Culture of Cruelty is No More Deaths' report on rampant U.S. Border Patrol abuse of immigration detainees, deportees and migrants apprehended on the U.S.-Mexico

"**Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope**" is a pastoral letter written by both the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Mexican Episcopal Conference. It was published on January 22, 2003. The lengthy pastoral letter deals with the issue of migration in the context of the United States and Mexico.

Why Does America Welcome Immigrants?

Matthew Spalding, Ph.D.

June 30, 2011

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/06/why-does-america-welcome-immigrants>

Coming to America (Second Edition): A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life by Roger Daniels (Oct 22, 2002)

Questions for Reflection

General Questions for Reflection:

How do faith and immigration intersect?

What are some common concerns about immigration, and how do they touch you personally?

How do you see immigrants enriching our lives as Americans?

If you could fix the problem of immigration, what would you implement or suggest?

Have you been involved in the process of immigration personally or as a companion, and what has the experience been like? What is successful and what is challenging?

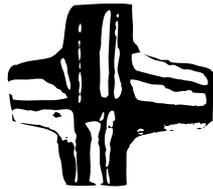
Immigrant Specific Questions:

As an immigrant, is citizenship or residency your ultimate goal? And why?

Has America lived up to your expectations? In what ways yes and no?

Has the American dream become a reality for you? What have the challenges been for you personally, or for your family?





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