

Summary: "Immigrations: Pilgrims and Strangers"
Franciscan Federation Region IV
Sunday, January 25, 2009
Mount St. Francis Dubuque, IA

Region's IV Justice Resolution for 2008-2009 was to educate ourselves around immigration issues and to financially donate to St. Bridget's parish in Postville IA to assist with rent, food, etc for the immigrants left without an income after a huge raid in May 08.

"Immigrations: Pilgrim and Strangers" was a grand event for the 100+ people who participated on Sunday, January 25, 2009, at Mount St. Francis, Dubuque, IA. Bill and Joanne Lange gave an insightful presentation on Sanctuary from a Biblical perspective as well as practice experience. They led into the two Mexican women's personal witness stories by telling us that the economy in Mexico fell apart when NAFTA moved in. NAFTA does not pay a Mexican living wage. Thus poverty has increased, workers are exploited and farm land has been displaced for the United States factories which were built. The government did not provide adequate housing for the workers.

Guadalupe began her story by sharing how happy she was as a child in Mexico. She married at age nineteen and their first born daughter died at age eighteen months. Her husband could not deal with the death, so he left her with no money, no income, and no place to live. She struggled to provide a home for herself while living with her parents. Several years later, he returned and provided a more stable family life. She had five more children with him. He died when the youngest was three. Her in-laws kicked her out of the house, thus she lived on the streets for years. Her oldest daughter was married by then, so she left her children with her and walked to the U.S. She settled in Milwaukee, has a job and has brought her children, one by one to the United States. She came because of hunger. She came because there was no hope in Mexico for her and her family. She now has hope, her family, a job and her faith in God. She begged us to do everything we can for immigration reform; namely that people here can receive documentation.

Azucena began by sharing the horrible circumstances of crossing the borders. She was raped by the men, burned by the exhaust pipe in the car since they had removed the back car seat and had them lying on the thin car floor. She was abandoned in Las Vegas by those who were to get her to Chicago. Thankfully some people in Las Vegas found her and got her some medical help and transportation to Chicago. Her American born father lived in Chicago, but after he met her, he did not want to help her anymore. So her brother, who lived in Milwaukee, has been there for her.

Both of these stories have many more details. It was the way these women shared their struggles and hopes that stole out hearts. Their faith in God came through very strong. They prayed that they would make it in the United States, and now they pray that they will not be deported. Azucena begged us to do all we can to stabilize the economy in every country so that people won't need to migrate. And to write letters so that immigration reform happens.

They all responded to questions, concerns, and comments. We were encouraged to write our legislatures postcard stating that we need to legalize immigration, plead for no more raids, and no more separation of families.

\$810.00 was collected for St. Bridget's parish in Postville IA. The money will be derived by Sr. Carol Besch and Sr. Pat Farrell, both Dubuque Franciscan who volunteer there once a month as counselors.

After reading this article, and hearing from some of us who participated in the day, the sisters at Manitowoc are planning another Region IV day on Immigration in the fall of '09 for their area.