

# Root Causes of Forced Migration

Week 7 (April 13-19):

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*Leviticus 19:33-34*

*When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt...*

## The Facts: Root Causes of Forced Migration

The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) defines forced migration as referring “to the movements of refugees and internally displaced people [people displaced by conflicts] as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or *development projects*.” (emphasis added)

Across the planet, millions of people have made what is often an agonizing decision: they must leave their homes in order to support and/or protect themselves and their families. Some migrants are fleeing war, repression or violent conflict; some are forced to leave their homes due to environmental disaster or famine; and most are on the move to escape poverty.

In the 2003 document “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope,” the Catholic bishops of Mexico and the U.S. identified areas of Catholic social teaching (CST) that guide the church’s response on migration issues, including:

- 1) **Persons have the right to find opportunity in their home land:** Work that provides a just living wage is a basic human need. Therefore, everyone has the right to find in their own country the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts; and
- 2) **Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families:** “The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people.” When a person cannot find work in his/her country of origin, s/he has the right to travel to another country to find employment.

January 2014 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the implementation of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which dramatically shifted Mexico’s agricultural sector: The purging of Mexican tariffs on corn, the change to Mexico’s constitution which eliminated small farmers’ access to public lands (which then allowed that land to be bought by foreign corporations), in addition to the decimation of corn prices for growers in Mexico combined with the skyrocketing retail price of tortillas, led to a huge migration to the U.S. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the number of annual immigrants to the U.S. from Mexico more than doubled from 370,000 in 1993, the year before NAFTA went into effect, to 770,000 in 2000, a 108 percent increase.



Low wages in migrant sending communities often make it impossible for many people to remain at home; those who are able to make it to the U.S. (or another high income country) and find employment can send back money which makes a significant difference for family members who remain behind.

## Stories from NETWORK’s Nuns on the Bus

By Sister Simone Campbell, SSS

There are two stories from the bus that shout in my memory to be told. They are entwined in motivation but so different in results.

The first occurred on a hot, hot afternoon in San Antonio, Texas. There we had an outdoor press event and rally to speak out for comprehensive immigration reform. Congressman Pete Gallego, who had just come in from the airport after a political trip, stood at the podium with his prepared text. His eight year old son Nicholas saw him and (oblivious to the big crowd) ran up and threw his arms around his father's waist to greet him.

Congressman Gallego, obviously touched, put his papers down and said that he was not going to use his prepared text. Rather, he spoke from the heart and told us that his attitude toward immigration reform was forever changed the first time he held Nicholas right after he was born. He told us that he knew in that moment that he would do whatever he could to protect his son. He would even give his life for his treasure. Many of us had tears in our eyes as we listened and knew the deep truth that he was sharing as a parent.

The second story came a few days later on the Pascua-Yaqui reservation outside of Tucson, Arizona. There, after our 'friendraiser,' Chairman Peter Yucupicio of the Pascua-Yaqui nation told me of the horror of living on the reservation [and] having desperate people try to cross the desert. He told me that he had found a woman curled up under a large desert bush. When they turned her huddled body over, they found that she was cradling the body of her infant child. What immediately struck me was that this nameless woman had the same commitment to her child as Congressman Gallego and most parents everywhere. The only difference is that her quest to protect her child ended in both of their deaths.

### *Prayer for migrants*

For all those who see "home" and all it means disappear behind them;  
For all those who cannot see a home in the days ahead of them;  
For all those who dwell in daily insecurity;  
For all those who are weary and without a safe place to rest their heads;  
For all families in migration we pray.

May the image of the Holy Family fleeing oppression stay with us each night as we are blessed with returning to a home. May we also be blessed with compassion for those still weary, still seeking, still with so far to go.

*Adapted from a prayer by Jane Deren, Center of Concern, 2007*

### **For Reflection:**

What would I be willing to sacrifice for the people I care the most about?

What are some of the other reasons why people might be forced to leave their home, and how am I contributing to the causes? What can I do to reduce the negative impact I have on the global community, and how can I encourage others to do the same?

People often migrate because of very low wages in their home community. Am I willing to pay a little more for the goods I buy that in turn provide more livable wages for others?

What are other ways we could appeal to members of Congress to encourage their support for immigration reform with a path to citizenship?