

LIFE, PEACE & JUSTICE MINISTRIES

“Love One Another”

Our Refugee Crisis (part 2 of 2)

Today we complete this two-part article written for us in November 2021 by Sr. Ann M. Durst, SHCJ, Esq. who founded Casa Cornelia Law Center.

Thirty minutes south of San Diego, thousands of Central American families who sought refuge pursuant to international and US law live in tent cities scattered throughout Tijuana. These petitioners were returned to Mexico to await adjudication of their asylum requests, which are not currently being processed. The imposition of an order closing the southern border has left these refugees stranded. Initially some 65,000 asylum seekers were returned to Mexico. Today, an estimated 25,000 await hearings in tent cities and shelters on a corridor from Tijuana to El Paso. They live in squalor. During their indefinite wait on the border they deal with threats from criminals and Mexican cartels; too many are victims of kidnapping, robbery and sexual assault.

San Diego is also bracing for the resettlement of hundreds of Afghan refugees. Local agencies, including Catholic Charities will be charged with securing housing, enrolling children in school, and providing multiple support services, including English as a second language. Most of these newcomers will be Muslim but meeting their needs will require involvement of a wider faith community as Pope Francis notes in his commentary on the parable of the Good Samaritan. (Fratelli Tutti, Chapter 2.)

These realities weigh on a region that is already home to an estimated 170,000 undocumented persons, a region which supports two immigration detention facilities housing some 1,500 asylum seekers from multiple countries. Casa Cornelia Law Center, as well as Catholic Charities, provides legal services to hundreds of these detainees and represents many in immigration court. Last year, Casa Cornelia responded to 1,329 requests for assistance and undertook representation of 170 asylum seekers. It provided legal services for 303 detained unaccompanied children and represented 200 non-detained abused and abandoned children in immigration proceedings. Nevertheless, many of their needs go unmet.

The faith community of San Diego is in the eye of a perfect storm that has been brewing for years. Now, as we examine our conscience to discern which characteristics of synodality are present and which are absent, perhaps we will find an effective way to give voice to the refugees and immigrants among us. In celebrating the Initiation of the Synodal Way, Bishop McElroy evoked the image of pilgrims journeying into the desert. If anyone knows about embarking on an unsure pathway into the desert, relying on God’s Providence, it is the migrant.



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Wisdom from Pope Francis

“Grant the followers of Jesus, and all people of good will, the grace to do your will on earth. Bless each act of welcome and outreach that draws those in exile into the “we” of community and of the Church.”

-World Migrants and Refugees Day 2021



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Throughout history people have been forced to migrate. Pope

Francis calls us to a shared response: to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate.

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This September 2021 *Border Refugees* article from Reuters

shares compelling images, data, trends, and stories from our southern border.

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