

Testimony

A Pamphlet from Pax Christi San Antonio

Anticipating April 28, 2019

Pax Christi San Antonio does not solicit donations. Thoughtful comments, however, may be sent to the editor at j6anthonyblasi@yahoo.com, with the understanding that permission to publish them is implied. Pax Christi International was founded in 1945 with the encouragement of Bishop Pierre Marie Théas of Montauban, France, by Marthe Dortel Claudot, as a Christian lay organization dedicated to preventing a repetition of the savagery of the twentieth century's world wars.

Editorial

After the calendar, the *Liturgical Reading* reflections are based on readings for the Second Sunday of Easter, or Mercy Sunday. The poem, by Mary Vineyard, is *Thomas*. It comes recommended by Tom Keene. After the poem comes a pastoral letter by Bishop Seitz of El Paso on immigration and the border. The deeply felt letter is not new, and that fact marks the tragedy that hardly anything has changed since it was written in 2017.



Photo by John Dauer

Calendar

In Austin

Thursday April 25, 6:30pm-**Friday April 26**, 4:00pm, Women in Charge at Church: Reimagining Authority and Power. Presenters: Cynthia Rigby, Jacqueline Lapsley, Bridgett Green, and Beverly Gaventa. \$100.00, includes meals. Westminster Presbyterian Church, 3208 Exposition Blvd. Information and registration: <https://www.ptsem.edu/events/women-in-charge-at-church-reimagining-authority-and-power>.

Tuesday April 30, 12:00pm-1:00pm, discussion: What is the Future of Speculative Journalism? (re nyti.ms/2MBsDRv). Fleck Hall 305, St. Edward's University, 3001 S. Congress. Information and parking: <https://www.stedwards.edu/contact-us/main-campus-united-states>.

In Dallas

Friday April 26, 8:00am-4:00pm, Paving the Way to Inclusion: Race, Place, & Schooling for Educational Equity. George W Bush Institute, SMU Campus, 2943 SMU Blvd.

In El Paso

Fridays, 12:00pm-1:00pm, Pax Christi joins Border Peace Presence in front of the Federal Courthouse (corner of Campbell and San Antonio).

Wednesday April 24, 12:00pm-1:00pm, death penalty vigil, in front of El Paso Courthouse.

In Houston

Wednesday April 24, 1:00pm, Cleve V. Tinsley IV (Rice U. doctoral candidate, dept. of religion), Makin Black Lives Matter: Race and Religion in Contemporary Struggles for African-American Identity (thesis defense). Humanities building 226. Information: graduate@rice.edu

Friday April 26, 8:00pm, Asma T. Uddin (U.C.L.A.), "When Islam Isn't a Religion." River Oaks Islamic Center, 3110 Eastside St. Information: tolerance@rice.edu.

Sunday April 28, 9:30 Earth Care Congregations Certification. St. Philip Presbyterian Church 201, 4807 San Felipe.

Saturday May 4, 7:00pm, documentary "Imprisoning a Generation." Follows four young Palestinians imprisoned under Israeli military occupation. Dir. Zelda Edmunds will answer questions after the screening. Rice Media Center auditorium room 100. Information: 713-348-4853 or 713-348-4882.

Sunday May 5, 9:30am, Walker Fair (Texas Solar outfitters), “Solar Power: Green is the new black.” St. Philip Presbyterian Church 201, 4807 San Felipe.

In San Antonio

Wednesday April 24, 12:00pm-1:00pm, death penalty vigil, across Dolorosa St. from County Justice Center.

Wednesday April 24, 6:00pm-8:00pm, panel, “Immigrant Justice is Racial Justice.” Laura Cortes (Mexican Consulate), Selene M. Gomez (SA Stands), Guillermo Hernandez (attorney), Mary Grace Ketner (Interfaith Welcome Committee), Einas Albadri (RAICES), Martha Lopez (YWCA), and Enrique Romero Moreno, moderator. YWCA, 503 Castroville Road. Information: 210-433-9922. Register at www.eventbrite.com/e/stand-against-racism-2019-tickets-598016373037.

Thursday April 25, 6:00pm-8:00pm, Anecdotally Yours. Ten story tellers with a bystander story concerning sexual violence. Main Exhibition Room, 1st floor, Central Library, 600 Soledad.

Tuesday April 30, 6:00pm (doors open), 6:30pm (program begins). Roger Enriques (UTSA), “A Nation of Immigrants: The Past, Present and Future of Immigration Law.” Casa Hernan, 411 E. Cevalles St. Information: edda.wallace@utsa.edu, 210-458-5110.

Saturday May 11, 8:30am-4:00pm, Social Justice Teaching 101 (for K through 12 teachers). Free, but register at <https://bit.ly.tmipl>. TMI, The Episcopal Academy, 20955 W. Tejas Trail.

Saturday June 1, 10:00am, Pax Christi San Antonio meeting. Residence of Tom Wakely, 16406 Ledge Point St.

Monday June 10, 4:00pm-**Wednesday June 12**, 8:30pm, Daniel P. Horan, ofm; Alana Levandoski, David Haas, Meg Hunter-Kilmer, and Ron Rolheiser, omi, Summer Institute 2019: Fear and Faith. Examines fear as a factor in stoking hatred. \$75-\$290. Whitley Theological Center, Oblate School of Theology. Lodging available in Oblate Renewal Center. Information: Noemy Colon, ncolon@ost.edu, or 210-341-1366, ext. 212.

Second Reading (Revelation 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19)

The second reading is from a work that is stuck in the back of most Bibles, often under the title *Revelation of John*. The actual title in Greek translates as *Revelation from Jesus, Messiah*. It was authored by an otherwise unknown prophet named John (not to be confused with John son of Zebedee, with the author of the Letters of John, or the source of much of the material in the Fourth gospel; it dates from the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 CE). The book has long been controversial, in part because much of it is written in the apocalyptic genre, something resembling our modern science fiction.

Fundamentalists read the apocalyptic imagery as if it contained literal and inerrant predictions about the end times.

Actually, there are two distinct parts of the *Revelation from Jesus, Messiah*—the first a series of letters to local churches in what is now Turkey, and the second consisting of apocalyptic railings against the evil Roman imperial government along with contrasting images of heavenly peace. Today's reading comes from the beginning of the first part. The author recites his experience of having a vision some time in the past when he was on the island of Patmos, where he gained the inspiration to write letters to seven local Christian congregations. The vision reaches a point at which one "like a son of humanity" says, "Fear not. I am the first and the last, and the living one; I also became dead, and behold I am living for ever and ever...."

Third Reading (Johannine Gospel 19:19-31)

"Doubting Thomas"—How many homilies have criticized doubt! Thomas wanted to see Jesus, even touch him, and he not only wanted to touch him, but to touch the *wounded* Jesus. Is that really something one should criticize?

The Johannine tradition itself does not seem to be so critical of relying on actually seeing for oneself. After a soldier stabbed the side of Jesus' corpse on the cross, that gospel says, "And he who watched has given witness, and his testimony is true, and he knows what he is saying is true, so that you too may believe" (John 19.35).

Thomas saw, so that whoever would hear his testimony would believe. Moreover, he wanted to verify the wounds. It was not merely a matter of an intellectual assent, but also having empathy for suffering. Thomas was refusing to merely believe; he wanted to be moved.

While living in Toronto, I made the acquaintance of an Estonian immigrant to Canada. In his youth he harbored hate and anger toward the Soviet Russians, who had deprived his homeland of its liberty. He joined a resistance group, aided by the Nazi Germans who had invaded the Soviet Union. But then he saw a convent of Catholic sisters caring for wounded combatants from both sides of the conflict. They touched the wounds, and touched his heart. He converted to Catholicism and eventually became a Catholic priest and scripture scholar.

Intellectual assent stands in contrast to skepticism, but it actually depends on skepticism because the process of overcoming the questions and objections posed from a skeptical standpoint results in really knowing about what one assents to. Faith, which encompasses more than intellectual assent, stands in contrast to doubt. Faith depends on doubt; indeed faith consists as much of doubt as it consists of assent. It is a disposition based on seeing and being moved, not on a facile yeah-saying.

So doubt, Thomas, and be believing. Come and go when others hide behind locked doors, and then seek to know.

Poem

Thomas

"Touch my wound," you say.
Trembling with dread,
I stretch out my hand.
I fall inside you,
and universes open to me.
I see that your wound
is my own, is everyone's
and it is limitless.
Yet you wrap yourself around it
so tenderly.
You become the shore
of that restless ocean.
I am too small to understand,
but I say, "My Lord, my God."
I am weeping in relief.
That is all the faith I have,
and all I need.

Mary Vinyard
Lubec, Maine
Printed in *National Catholic Reporter*

SORROW AND MOURNING FLEE AWAY

Pastoral Letter on Migration to the People of God in the Diocese of El Paso

Mark Joseph Seitz

Bishop of El Paso

July 18, 2017

The burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water ... And the ransomed of the LORD shall enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy. They meet with joy and gladness ... sorrow and mourning flee away. (Isaiah 35: 7, 10)

INTRODUCTION

Four years ago, I came to the Chihuahuan Desert to take up the responsibility given to me by Pope Francis to steward the Church of God in El Paso. I came as a migrant to a community of migrants. Since then, I have seen your works, your faith, your charity and your endurance. I have shared in your challenges: the difficulties of raising a family today, anxieties about the future that tempt our young people, and the loneliness that

burdens the old. Even in the midst of these struggles, with the burning sands and thirsty ground of summer, in the faith of the people of El Paso I have seen sorrow and mourning flee.

2. The Lord hears the cry of the poor (cf. Ps. 34: 7). Since Jesus announced Good News to the poor, our Church has been called to stand with the suffering. The Church must illuminate the challenges of the moment with the light of the Gospel, pointing out what reflects the Kingdom of God and what does not. As I write this letter to you, we are living in trying times as a country and migrants are living through a dark night of fear and uncertainty. Our border community knows the reality of a broken immigration system. As your pastor, I cannot ignore the stumbling block of a system that causes so much suffering among God's people. Misguided policies and walls are widening the divide between us and our sister city of Ciudad Juárez, deportations are separating parents from children, and harsh political rhetoric is causing fear in our parishes and neighborhoods. It is with this in mind that I feel it important to write to you now.

3. Our broken system of immigration is a wound on this border community. It is a scandal to the Body of Christ in El Paso. As Christians, our mission is to announce the Kingdom in the midst of a world "which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way."¹ As God's people here on the border, we are called to transform this desert, making refreshing pools of the burning sands of injustice and quenching the thirst of the oppressed. In this letter to you, the People of God in El Paso, I invite you to consider the challenges of a system which is breaking apart our community and to reflect upon how God is asking us to respond. In bold and specific ways, I wish to grow in our commitment to charity and justice on our border and towards our migrant brothers and sisters.

NAMING OUR REALITY

Our Unique Border Identity

4. God has richly blessed our border community. We reject narratives that paint our border as a place of chaos, violence and mayhem. As a community deeply shaped by the reality of migration, we celebrate our strengths and unique identity, as well as its safety and security, even when others would belittle the contribution of migrants and falsely portray the reality of the border. Our border brings together cultures, peoples and countries. We are united in family, fiesta and faith. As one of the largest bi-national border communities in the world, migration is a part of our DNA. The vast majority here have strong ties across the border in Mexico, particularly in Ciudad Juárez. With our brothers and sisters across the bridge, we speak the same language. We wake up each morning to the same beautiful mountains, we dance to the rhythm of mariachis, and we share burritos and champurrado. With San Juan Diego, we stand together under the mantle of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

5. Providence has blessed the peoples, lands and mountains of the Chihuahuan Desert, a place of constant migration. Our desert has been home to indigenous communities, like the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, or Tigua, since time immemorial. These communities have a long and honorable legacy of trade, self-government and free movement of peoples which has shaped our border region for centuries, although their rights have not always been respected. So as not to repeat the errors of the past, we

¹ FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium (24 November 2013), 114.1.

should “educate new generations not to turn their back on our ‘neighbors’ and everything around us.”² In 1598, before even the first Thanksgiving in New England, a Holy Mass of Thanksgiving was celebrated by Spanish migrants in San Elizario, the first seat of El Paso County. The migrant colonists feasted together with members of the Manso indigenous tribe. Paso del Norte, the one community founded on the banks of the Rio Grande that has become the two cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juárez, grew as an important stop on the Camino Real, connecting Santa Fe with Mexico City. Migrants from the then-Republic of Texas and from United States would soon increase our numbers. Workers from as far away as Ireland and China arrived to build the railroad running through El Paso that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. El Pasoans welcomed those fleeing dangers at the time of the Mexican Revolution and during the Cristero War. Many of those living in Ciudad Juárez found safety in our city, including priests, religious and seminarians. In those years the saintly Chihuahuan priest, Pedro de Jesus Maldonado, was ordained in our Cathedral, and was later canonized as one of the Mexican Martyrs.

During the Second World War, braceros came to tend our fields and crops. At the end of the last century, another generation of migrants from Mexico came with hopes for a better future after massive displacements caused by changing trade relations. Many have arrived here from other parts of the country, having come to serve at Fort Bliss and then deciding to stay in our beautiful region, which quickly makes one feel at home. We continue to receive survivors of violence, poverty and persecution from countries around the world that look to us for safety and refuge. New Americans revitalize our community with the values of faith, family and hard work.

6. Even in hardships, reversals and disappointments, the Spirit has been at work in this long history of migrations, moving hearts to hospitality, rewarding hope with opportunities for work, and building harmony in diversity. Our Chihuahuan Desert has been a powerful place of encounter, where a true culture of *encuentro* has taken root and allowed flowers of life, culture and faith to bloom even in the driest of sands. The Church’s work of evangelization takes place within this great drama, announcing words of blessing, affirming life and pointing to the Kingdom. We are servants on the patient journey towards the civilization of love that the Spirit is preparing for all humanity.

7. As a border community, we have a unique vocation to demonstrate the Christian virtue of hospitality. I am humbled by the charity and initiative of our people in welcoming the stranger. Our diocese is blessed with heroic individuals, families, pastors, religious, parishes and institutions that spend themselves in service to migrants and refugees. For nearly forty years, Annunciation House has welcomed thousands fleeing conflict, hunger and persecution. Parishes and convents have opened their doors in unprecedented ways to those who continue to arrive to our border from Mexico, Central America, Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and so many other countries. Our people advocate for just laws and against the militarization of our border. Our Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services fulfills a critical community need in providing legal services. The newly arrived learn English in our parish halls, receive food and clothing from parish pantries and *despensas*, and are accompanied to bus stations and the airport by volunteers. Know Your Rights trainings are offered after Mass and new citizens register to vote for the first time. Volunteers offer words of comfort to those in immigrant

² FRANCIS, Address to the Joint Session of the United States Congress (2015).

detention and parish RICO ministries offer faith formation and celebrate the birthdays and quinceañeras of detained unaccompanied minors. There is no distinction between documented and undocumented when together we receive the Bread of Life in our chapels and churches. In all these works, we see how Christ continues to unite himself to humanity in our time. As your bishop, I have much for which to be grateful.

A Broken System of Immigration

8. Not everyone sees our broken immigration system in the same way. Yet we can all agree that the present system is not functioning adequately. The moral consequences of this system for our brothers and sisters simply cannot be ignored. Pope Francis often says that “realities are more important than ideas”.³ No one can deny the terrible human impacts of a system that divides families, permits some to detain human beings for profit, and compromises our nation’s historic commitment to the refugee and asylum seeker. The burning sands of our desert are an unmarked grave for too many migrants who have died attempting to cross. Increased militarization and more walls will only make this journey even more dangerous. Our border community bears disproportionately the burdens of a broken system. I am shepherd of a diocese with multiple immigrant detention centers that hold untold numbers of human beings every night, where anguish multiplies and hope is dimmed. I am pastor of a diocese divided by walls and checkpoints that separate individuals from loved ones. I am bishop of a flock frightened by the flashing lights of police cars in the rearview mirror, who wonder if this family outing or that drive home from work will be the last. I am spiritual father to thousands of Border Patrol and ICE agents, who put their lives on the line to stem the flow of weapons and drugs and those who carry them. Many agents are troubled in conscience by divisive political rhetoric and new edicts coming from Washington, DC. I am a citizen of a community where children worry whether mom or dad will be there when they return from school. In this situation, daily I ask the Lord to give me the right words to console, to denounce injustice and announce redemption.

9. Recently we have witnessed indefensible, hateful words towards our neighbors in Mexico, the demonization of migrants, and destructive language about our border. This year, enforcement actions have escalated and the deportation of those with no criminal record has increased. Distrust has grown between communities and those who enforce our nation’s laws. We have seen asylum seekers, even journalists fleeing for their lives, now put into detention as a matter of course. We have heard threats that migrant children might be separated from their mothers at the border. Here in Texas, community policing efforts essential for our safety are threatened by a new law, SB4, which will authorize local officers to serve as immigration agents, raising the spectre of a mass deportation force. Though our Church has been clear about the imperative to solve this perennial problem, our elected leaders have not yet mustered the moral courage to enact permanent, comprehensive immigration reform. Still migrants are treated, as Pope Francis says, as “pawns on the chessboard of humanity”.⁴ Their labor and talents are exploited but they are denied the protections of the law and are scapegoated for our social and economic ills.

³ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 231.

⁴ Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2014). Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2014).

Confronting Our Reality

The Teaching of the Church on Migration

10. Who can forget the moving visit of Pope Francis to the Rio Grande last year? I remember the faces of the many migrants, survivors of violence, workers and unaccompanied minors -- our "Pope Francis V.I.P.'s" -- who greeted the Holy Father in the name of El Paso community, and indeed the entire United States, as he approached the Rio Grande. I cannot but think that theirs were the faces of the American dream, signed with struggle but pregnant with hope. The haunting chant of the Requiem aeternam, the Church's prayer for the dead, sung by the choir as the pope approached the border fence to pray for those who died in the desert, never to realize their earthly dreams, should sear our memory. His plea for an end to the tragedy of forced migration was clear - "No more death! No more exploitation!"⁵

11. Pope Francis expressed the Church's entire teaching on migration in that moment on the Rio Grande: encounter, conversion and compassion. This teaching rests on ancient foundations. The Old Testament is clear: "You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 19:34). Jesus himself was a refugee on the flight into Egypt (cf. Mt. 2:13-23). We know that God stands on the side of migrants, and "is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them" (Heb. 11:16). Every human being bears within him or her the image of God, which confers upon us a dignity higher than any passport or immigration status. On account of this dignity, the Church has long recognized the first right of persons not to migrate, but to stay in their community of origin. But when that has become impossible, the Church also recognizes the right to migrate.⁶ While countries have a duty to ensure that immigration is orderly and safe, this responsibility can never serve as a pretext to build walls and shut the door to migrants and refugees.

12. Law should be at the service of human beings and should ensure the sanctity of all life. Laws that do not respect human dignity and ensure due process must be changed. While respect for the rule of law is essential, we recognize that our true "citizen-ship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), and so we judge earthly law, including our immigration laws, according to a higher criterion. As Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote from the Birmingham jail, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, "an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law."⁶ We must also beware of those "doctors of the law", the scribes and Pharisees of our day, who self-righteously hold others to a standard they would never apply to themselves. They attempt to enforce minutiae of the law meanwhile ignoring the unbearable burdens they are laying on children and families (cf. Matt. 23: 1-23).

The Need for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

13. Building walls, deploying a mass deportation force and militarizing our border are not long-term solutions to the challenges of migration. Only comprehensive

⁵ Homily at Mass at Ciudad Juárez Fairgrounds (17 February 2016). Homily at Mass at Ciudad Juárez Fairgrounds (17 February 2016).

⁶ I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World. Ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), 89.

immigration reform will bring lasting solutions. In our country, the United States Conference of Bishops has been the most consistent advocate for migrants and for comprehensive immigration reform, with its work deeply rooted in biblical teaching and the papal magisterium, including the teaching of popes Francis, Benedict XVI and John Paul II. Comprehensive immigration reform should include the following:

- Nations that enjoy the peace, prosperity and security that we do must ensure that there are sufficient legal avenues for migrants workers and their families, who fill important roles in our economy, to migrate in a safe and orderly way.
- Reforming our immigration system means putting families first. We should end deportation practices that separate families and adopt a system that prioritizes family unity. It can currently take decades for families to be reunited through today's burdensome and expensive system.
- As a country, we are involved in the drivers of migration, through things like unfair trade policies, our addiction to drugs and even climate change. Lawmakers should address the root causes of migration and promote sustainable economic development abroad, which will allow our brothers and sisters to remain in their home countries and support themselves and their families in safety.
- Comprehensive immigration reform will provide security while still allowing for the orderly entry of people into our country, especially those fleeing for their lives. As millions are brought out of the shadows and given the chance to regularize their situation, law enforcement officials will be able to focus on those who are truly a threat to our communities.

14. We will never build a utopia in this broken world of ours. Guarding mere passing possessions is not our goal. We serve a God of abundance who provides for the needs of those who serve Him with charity and generosity. We trust that God did not create a world without room for all at the banquet of life. By remembering our ultimate destiny and trusting in He who accompanies us we can recognize that our generous service here prepares us for the Kingdom to come.

The Power of “Encuentro”

15. While the teaching of the Church on migration is rich and persuasive, sometimes nothing can substitute for personal experience. I remember that as a parish priest, I would often travel to Honduras to minister to a sister parish there. The extreme poverty in which the people lived was like nothing we in this country could imagine and the violence was pervasive. There I met a committed member of the parish, Delia, a mother of five girls and a boy, a beautiful but very poor family. Her 16-year-old daughter, Irma, would beg me to bring her to the United States. One day, the daughter decided to make the journey on her own. She ended up in a detention center in South Texas.

Years later, her younger sister, Aura, also made the difficult decision to come. I received a phone call telling me that Aura, just 24-years-old, was in detention in El Paso. She had crossed the bridge from Ciudad Juárez. She was alive, thank God, but she didn't survive the trip without serious physical and psychological wounds. Aura had been forced into slavery by a gang in Honduras, made to suffer unspeakable cruelty.

She had to choose between continued enslavement and leaving her sick mother. When she made the agonizing decision to flee, she was kept locked in a compartment under a bus, forced to inhale toxic fumes for hours on end. She escaped and made it through the nightmare of the desert all the way to our border. But after escaping from criminals, here in the land where she hoped she would be safe she was treated like a criminal, put behind bars in immigrant detention. Sadly, Aura isn't alone in her experience. We who minister along the border know the stories of the those who continue to come fleeing violence, hunger and countries destabilized in no small part because of our insatiable appetite for drugs. For some, deportation back to those situations may even be a death sentence. We will fix our broken immigration system the day we stop seeing people like Aura with fear and with stony hearts.

16. I remember, too, the faces of those who bravely told their migration stories in our Cathedral during our Witness to Dignity & Solidarity, held together with our civic and interfaith community earlier this year. We heard the voices of Dreamers, asylum seekers and migrant families. I remember Rosa, a mother of three children and grandmother of four, who crossed the border without documents nearly 30 years ago. Rosa is a pillar of the Segundo Barrio neighborhood and as well as an untiring volunteer at our Sacred Heart Parish. Because Rosa's husband was deported a long time ago, she faced the challenge of raising a family on her own, working long days cleaning homes and caring for those with disabilities. She has raised a strong and beautiful family. Her daughter Rosa is a committed teacher in our public schools and her son Jesus is a hardworking engineer. Who can deny that our community would be diminished without the faith, hard work and contributions of Rosa and her family?

17. These moments of encounter with our migrant brothers and sisters can be occasions for conversion. More and more people go about their daily lives today as if God did not exist. This growing indifference towards God seems to exist side by side with a growing coldness towards the poor and suffering, as if they did not exist. In times of anguish and confusion we ask- where is God? But the Gospel teaches us that we will find Him among the poor and excluded, in their "struggle for survival" which "contains within it a profound understanding of life which often includes a deep religious sense."⁷ As our Holy Father says, the poor "have much to teach us. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them."⁸ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 72.9 Ibid. 198.flee, she was kept locked in a compartment under a bus, forced to inhale toxic fumes for hours on end. She escaped and made it through the nightmare of the desert all the way to our border. But after escaping from criminals, here in the land where she hoped she would be safe she was treated like a criminal, put behind bars in immigrant detention.Sadly, Aura isn't alone in her experience. We who minister along the border know the stories of the those who continue to come fleeing violence, hunger and countries destabilized in no small part because of our insatiable appetite for drugs. For some, deportation back to those situations may even be a death sentence. We will fix our broken immigration system the day we stop seeing people like Aura with fear and with stony hearts.

Migrants are prophetic in their lived testimony to values increasingly sidelined in today's culture: faith, life and family. And they wake us from our indifference, opening our eyes

⁷Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 72.

⁸ Ibid. 198

to the injustices of globalization and “an economy of exclusion and inequality.”⁹ I am convinced that the depth of faith of our people and the vitality of our parishes are owed in no small part to our community’s generosity in welcoming the stranger and the option we make for the poor.

18. There may be those who question whether in these reflections I am not substituting politics for the teaching of the Church. I answer that as a pastor my duty is to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our migrant brothers and sisters, those who worship in our churches, minister in our parishes, study in our schools, labor in the fields, serve in our armed forces ... each of them today is living in a desert of anxiety and isolation. For many of those who continue to come to our border, they are not just seeking a better life, but life itself. Our Christian community is called to journey with them in their anxiety and pain on the road to liberation, away from sorrow and mourning and on the road to a future of joy and gladness. God wishes to save his people today, by making a new history. We are called to action!

Transforming Our Reality

19. We must continue to show compassion and attend to the material and spiritual needs of the tens of thousands of undocumented migrants in our diocese and to those who continue to arrive at our border. Our solidarity must be effective. In order to examine the question of migration in the light of a changing political climate and to assist me in discerning a path forward for our diocese towards deeper solidarity, I am establishing a Diocesan Commission on Migration. We know that as a Church we “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.”¹⁰ This pastoral letter is an important milestone in that work, but I hope it is just a beginning of a deeper solidarity with the poor and excluded.

20. To Our Migrant Brothers and Sisters, We Stand With You! As your bishop, I pledge my commitment to stand with you in this time of anxiety and fear. I promise to hear you, celebrate with you, break bread with you, pray with you and weep with you. You possess a dignity that no earthly law or court can take away. Your families enrich our community and strengthen our parishes. Your perseverance, dedication and enthusiasm for a better future renew our hope. In this time of trial, remember that our one hope is Christ, whose grace is sufficient for us and whose power is perfected in weakness (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). Know that the Church of El Paso is with you, defends and affirms your human dignity, and advocates for your rights. As one example of this commitment, I am establishing a new Soñador Fund to offer financial assistance to children of our migrant families to attend our Catholic schools. I will begin this new scholarship fund with a personal contribution. Historically, Catholic education has been one of the most effective means of empowering migrants and helping them to integrate into our community and country. Catholic schools in the Diocese of El Paso have transformed lives and I am committed to growing this legacy. I invite those with means to assist me in increasing this vital support for our children.

21. To Our Priests and Parishes, Advocate for Migrants! Our parishes should be places where migrants are welcomed and strengthened in their faith. Our faith community is also called to announce the Good News of the Kingdom, shaping the

⁹ Ibid. 53.

¹⁰ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 28.

terms of public debate for a more just society and witnessing to the values of mercy, justice and truth. Our parishes should be hubs of prayer, study and dialogue, where Catholics can get involved in the work of building a more humane border through education and advocacy. We must continue to denounce the evil of family separation, the militarization of our border communities, for-profit immigrant detention, the mistreatment of asylum seekers and the disparagement of our Muslim brothers and sisters. We must address the plague of substance abuse afflicting our people, the confusion and depression that push our children to drugs, and the drug trafficking destabilizing Mexico and Central America, driving migration to our border. We must confront the injustice of a global economy of exclusion that forces maquila workers in Ciudad Juárez to earn among the lowest factory wages in Mexico. We must work to overcome the polarization tearing our communities apart. The Commission on Migration will work with parishes to intensify our advocacy, particularly through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Justice for Immigrants Campaign. An intensive formation program will be offered through Tepeyac Institute to develop leaders to serve as members of parish advocacy and rapid response teams for families affected by deportation or detention. Together with our neighbors and other faith groups, we must engage our elected leaders as well as the leaders of local law enforcement and immigration enforcement agencies to promote the common good.

22. To Our Faithful, Get Engaged Locally! I call on the faithful to get even more deeply involved in the many works of charity and justice undertaken daily on behalf of migrants within our diocese. The work of Annunciation House and the efforts of Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services are a source of pride for our community. I also commend the work of the Casa del Migrante in Ciudad Juárez, which shelters and feeds those newly arriving to our border and those who have been deported. Many of our local community organizations have been supported by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and have proven themselves to be effective advocates for human dignity and the rights of migrants. Everyday our parishes provide support and spiritual nourishment to migrants in ways that often go unnoticed. All of us can assist in this great work by getting involved as volunteers and through our support.

23. To Law Enforcement and Immigration Enforcement Agents, Thank You! Know that your dedication and bravery in serving our community and protecting our country are appreciated. Local law enforcement representatives have taken important stands in prioritizing community policing and limiting participation in immigration enforcement. Even in the face of SB4, I hope the positive gains of local law enforcement in engaging migrant communities will not be lost. Those who administer our nation's immigration laws daily face difficult and sometimes dangerous situations. I appeal to you, do not ignore the obligations of conscience! Treat all you encounter with dignity and respect and with the American values of fairness and justice. To agents who work in the field, remember that those who you encounter in your work are your brothers and sisters, children of God. No human being is illegal! I promise to pray for your daily safe return to your homes and families. To those in leadership in Border Patrol and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, I appeal to your dedication to the noble ideals in the Constitution of equal treatment under the law and due process. While I would not offer false expectations of protection to those without legal immigration status, it is my pastoral duty to ensure that our churches and Catholic schools remain places of unity,

hospitality and reverence. Thus, I have instructed our diocesan counsel to send a memorandum to pastors and Catholic school principals indicating to them that agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol are to be respectfully told that they are not to enter church premises to execute enforcement actions without a warrant signed by a judge if there is not a situation of imminent danger. I count on your goodwill in maintaining respect for sensitive locations like places of worship, hospitals and schools and in preserving public order. I promise my collaboration and sincere wishes for a continued productive relationship and exchange of viewpoints on behalf of the common good of this community.

24. To Our Community Leaders, We Pledge to Work With You! El Paso is blessed with many advocates who work everyday to build a better border community. To our elected leaders, we promise to collaborate with you in building a society where the rights of every human person are respected and to support you in taking courageous stances on behalf of the common good and in defense of the poor. To our teachers, we thank you for making classrooms places where all our children feel safe and supported. To those in the media, I thank you for conveying truthful and critical information to the community. To the many borderland ecumenical and interfaith leaders, I am proud of our common witness to the power of faith to move hearts to justice and I look forward to working with you to advance the core commitments of our faith traditions to hospitality and welcoming the stranger.

25. To Those Outside Our Border Community, Come and See! The portrait of our border depicted in the media and promoted by those in faraway capitals is often inaccurate and driven more by private interest than interest in the truth. Our border is beautiful, rich in history and culture, faith and natural wonder. This is a place where people of many cultures, languages and nationalities coexist and thrive. I invite young people, volunteers, attorneys and other professionals to spend time with us in service opportunities available through our many church and community organizations. I ask lawmakers and policymakers in other parts of the country to end the demonization of our border, our border residents and migrants. Migrants and migration are not problems to be solved, but are rather “a great resource for humanity’s development.”¹¹ The voice of border communities must be taken into consideration in the shaping of border enforcement policies and in debates on immigration reform. Let us reject a mindset of hostility and work together in generous cooperation for the common good.

Conclusion

26. We belong to “a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all.”¹³ Every year, the faithful of Ciudad Juárez, Las Cruces and El Paso come together to celebrate the Border Mass. We find ourselves divided by a fence or a river, by an economy of exclusion or unjust migration policies. Yet, even in the midst of all that divides us, the Border Mass is a joyful reminder that the Eucharistic Christ is building a New Humanity, leading all of us together to the New Jerusalem. Our Lady of Guadalupe inspires in us a vision of the Americas as a great Temple for God’s people, where the ransomed of the LORD shall enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy. May these bonds of charity continue to grow and inflame our hearts. May we take up new and prophetic actions to bring about the Kingdom of justice, truth and reconciliation

¹¹ BENEDICT XVI, Address, Angelus (14 January 2007).

in order to transform this desert, so that the burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water. 26. We belong to “a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all.”¹² Every year, the faithful of Ciudad Juárez, Las Cruces and El Paso come together to celebrate the Border Mass. We find ourselves divided by a fence or a river, by an economy of exclusion or unjust migration policies. Yet, even in the midst of all that divides us, the Border Mass is a joyful reminder that the Eucharistic Christ is building a New Humanity, leading all of us together to the New Jerusalem. Our Lady of Guadalupe inspires in us a vision of the Americas as a great Temple for God’s people, where the ransomed of the LORD shall enter Zion singing, crowned with everlasting joy. May these bonds of charity continue to grow and inflame our hearts. May we take up new and prophetic actions to bring about the Kingdom of justice, truth and reconciliation in order to transform this desert, so that the burning sands will become pools, and the thirsty ground, springs of water.

Links

Pax Christi International
<http://www.paxchristi.net/>

Pax Christi U.S.A.
<http://www.paxchristiusa.org>

Pax Christi Texas
<http://www.paxchristitexas.org>

Pax Christi Dallas
<http://www.Paxchristidallastx.org>

Pax Christi San Antonio
<http://www.paxchristisa.org>

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative
www.msjc.net

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, International JPIC Committee
<http://saccvi.blogspot.com/>

San Antonio Peace Center
<http://www.sanantoniopace.center>

Interfaith Radio, (*Interfaith Voices*)
<http://www.interfaithradio.org/>

¹² FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 210.

Texas Catholic Campaign to End the Death Penalty
www.txccedp.org

Dialogue Institute of San Antonio
www.thedialoginstitute.org/san-antonio/

Climate Change
www.creation-care.com

NowCastSA
www.nowcastsa.com/