

Why Do People Migrate?

Immigrant Justice Resource and Discussion Guide



This meeting kit is adapted from the resource and discussion guide provided by MSJC for use by Marianist communities (lay or religious) and parish groups who seek a deeper understanding and prayerful response to issues related to immigration justice in light of Catholic Social Teaching and the Marianist charism.

Introduction

There are five meeting kits dealing with Immigrant Justice, each of which is designed to be used for one evening. Choose one that seems most relevant or useful for your group and focus on that one at your meeting. All of the Immigrant Justice meeting kits use the same opening and closing prayers.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed are you, O God, creator of all that is. While most of us live in safe homes with at least the basic necessities of life, we know that not everyone does. Those who suffer from inadequate income, food, or safety because of the color of their skin or the country

where they live are our neighbors. They may not live next door, but Jesus reminds us that even the stranger is our neighbor. Help us to be generous and welcoming as You have been to us. Show us how. Amen.

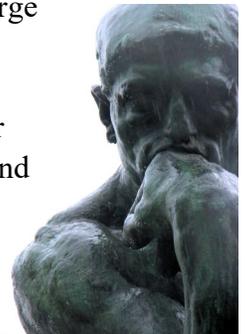
Food for Thought

People who study migration speak of two reasons that people leave their homes. They are often called push and pull factors. Pull factors include economic and educational opportunities, religious and political freedom, and the reunification of families. Push factors often cited include war, violence, poverty, and famine and drought—caused by the misuse of lands for economic change, which is related to climate change. Let's explore how these push-and-pull factors work in a geographic area close to us: Central America.

Brief History of Central American Migration

In order to understand the issue of why people are leaving their homes in Central America and trying to come to the US and why people are sending their children on a perilous journey to a hostile foreign land, we need to learn more about the history of the Central American region.

Today, the factors impacting the surge of migrants from Central America include multinational corporations appropriating and misusing land for political gain, political corruption and repression, the violence of drug cartels and gangs, and climate change that has affected the ability for subsistence farmers to grow food for their families. A study of the history of this region shows that US intervention in Central America, which started in the 1950s during the Cold War, has contributed to these problems. The US involvement included the CIA overthrowing the elected government of Guatemala in 1954 and backing right-wing dictators in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua with economic and military aid in the '60s. When the Central American people



began to respond to this situation, the US again intervened and supported right-wing military regimes that suppressed the uprisings. In response to death squads and counterinsurgency militias, covertly trained in the US, thousands of Central Americans fled north rather than face the possibility of death for themselves and their children. A quarter of a million people were killed, hundreds of thousands were displaced, and tens of thousands came to the US. These conflicts created many of the push factors which led to the current migration issues.

The Current Push Factors

The current situation in Central America is frightening. Jobs are not available because of abuses of power and land by multinational corporations.

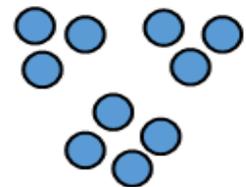
Widespread violence from gangs exists; children are threatened with losing their lives or the lives of their family members if they don't join a gang. (For more information about the gang problem and US involvement, see the related link below.)



Women and girls are at risk of being raped or kidnapped and becoming victims of human trafficking. People can't make enough money to feed their families adequately. Parents can't afford to send their children to school because it can cost half of their income.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How would you feel as a parent if faced with the conditions mentioned above? What would you imagine your options to be? What would you risk to get your children out of this situation?
- As a follower of Jesus and a member of the community of Marianists, how do you feel moved to respond to migrants who leave their country of origin because of the above conditions?
- Based on the Marianist charism, what would be your personal and political response to this issue?



For Additional Background on the History of US Involvement in Central America:

Fleeing a Hell the US Helped Create: Why Central Americans Journey North, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/dec/19/central-america-migrants-us-foreign-policy>

An indigenous perspective from Guatemala: *500 Years* documentary, <https://www.pbs.org/pov/watch/500years/>

The video can be rented very inexpensively at <https://www.amazon.com/500-Years-Pamela-Yates/dp/B076HBSVPV>.

A number of gangs in Central America began in the US during the migrations in the 1980s. For more information, see *How the U.S. Fueled the Rise of MS13* <https://www.pbs.org/video/how-us-fueled-rise-ms-13-u5kujm/>.

CLOSING PRAYER

Merciful Jesus, as an infant you fled to Egypt with Mary and Joseph. You were a vulnerable family in a foreign land, looking for shelter and sustenance. Help us to welcome those like you who cross our borders

today. Give us hearts of compassion for all migrants; help us to shape a humane response to their needs and to pass laws and policies that respect the dignity of all who come to our country. Amen.

Some Actions to Consider

As Marianists and as Christians, what action might we commit to take (individually or as a community) to respond to this issue?

- Pray for immigrants, refugees, and all affected by the crisis at our borders.
- Study the immigration issue in more depth. Each person might take one of the resources or resource groups listed below and report back to the group.
- Participate in vigils, rallies, and other gatherings that advocate for immigrant justice.
- Visit or write to immigrants in detention facilities.
- Assist as volunteers at sites providing immigrant sanctuary.
- Become involved by writing letters to political leaders to uphold the dignity of life for asylum seekers and other migrants.



Additional Resources

[Calling the Marianist Family to Renounce the Sin of Racism](#)

A call to action by the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, with many specific action suggestions, that challenges the Marianist Family to commit to ending racism.

[Would Jesus, Mary and Joseph be Welcome in Our Country Today?](#)

A short reflection on this question

[Justice for Immigrants](#)

The campaign by the US Bishops to educate the public about Church teaching on migration and to create the political will for just and humane immigration reform.

[National Immigration Forum](#)

Advocates for the value of immigrants to our nation by promoting responsible federal immigration policy.

[Sojourners Immigration Action](#)

Immigration actions and resources from Sojourners, an interfaith social justice group.

[Interfaith Immigration Coalition](#)

A coalition of religious groups that calls on Congress and the Administration to enact humane and equitable immigration policy reforms.

[Hope Border Institute](#)

A Catholic based organization that works on the Mexico/US border doing research, advocacy, and leadership development.

[Marianist Statement on Immigration Reform](#)

Sign up at <https://msjc.net/get-involved> to get the monthly *Justice Jottings* and *Immigration Update* from MSJC.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Related resources available at nacms.org include:

Things Marianist: "How Do Marianists Do Social Justice?", by Jim Vogt

The Marianist Founders and Social Justice, Felipe Melcher, SM

Introduction to Social Justice, William J. Ferree, SM

Marianist Charism and Our Life/Work Among the Poor, Joseph Jansen, SM

Marianist Community Meeting Kits are provided for the Marianist Family by the North American Center for Marianist Studies, NACMS. Additional kits, as well as other Marianist Studies resources, are available at <https://nacms.org/>.

 North American Center
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