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## *On Immigration*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by Deacon Juan Sandoval**

According to An Outline of Faith, commonly called the Catechism, the mission of the laity is to represent Christ and his Church and to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world (BCP 855). The work of reconciliation takes varied forms, but I will address immigration.

I have served several Spanish-speaking Episcopal communities and other Spanish-speaking school programs. I started serving some of those in need several years ago as a chaplain for the children of a pre-K school. The students were from various Central American countries including Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Each Friday we would gather, sing, and pray. I would provide a simple sermon on a particular text in order to convey the concept to them. I began to notice that many of the mothers of these children had a poor command of the English language. In working with some lay leaders in the church, we were able to begin a basic class for them, English for Busy Moms. This assisted them in activities of daily living, such as parent-teacher conferences, doctor's office visits, banking, using the library, and navigating the streets by reading a map. I was so thrilled when one of the ladies called her doctor to make an appointment. The first year of the class, there were seven attendees, but year two produced forty-two students. This program continues to this day. The most important factor in creating these programs is the involvement of the laity.

Why am I compelled to assist our immigrants neighbors? After years of working closely with many Spanish-speaking Episcopal communities as a deacon, I have come to know and love these people. The majority are here mostly to find a better life for themselves and their family. However, over the past years, they have experienced increased emotional stress as there has been no legislation enacted for permanent status or steps toward citizenship. Their emotional stress comes in various ways: profiling, individuals being detained at a hearing for legal status, families being separated due to one or both parents being deported, children possibly sent to foster system, and additional monies needed to pursue legal papers.

Involvement is the crux of this work. Just as Jesus sent out his disciples, we too must go out into the world to do the work. I would suggest that advocacy, assistance, and education are areas of involvement for our community. Being involved in various forms of advocacy is a prime. This means making calls to your representatives and senators in support or against certain legislation in committee or up for vote. Whatever your belief is, you can make a difference by calling senators and representatives to voice your views. Assistance comes in many forms and could be something as simple as writing a letter to a detainee or providing clothing and hygiene kits to the children. Perhaps court watch is another form of assistance. This allows you to be in the court room to see proceedings. Education is so very important in providing classes or information of various types. English as a Second Language is one method of teaching our immigrant, refugee, or asylum-seeking neighbors a new language.

Our work in this realm is real and necessary. This is the work Jesus showed us by his example in working with those in the margins, those who were persecuted, those who were ostracized, those who had no one to speak on their behalf, and those who need our love and our attention. May our God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be always with us on this journey and may she guide us to do this continuing and difficult work of advocating for, educating, and assisting our immigrant neighbors.

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