Catherine McAuley lived the message of the Gospel in her service to those who are poor. The Sisters of Mercy continue her mission today by committing "our lives and resources to act in solidarity with the economically poor of the world," (Direction Statement, 2005). The Fourth Institute Chapter recognized the call to intensify our responses to needs of our times and specified five critical concerns we cannot ignore.

Economic poverty is the root cause or effect of each critical concern. As we consider migration/immigration and the pushes and pulls of the present global movement of peoples, we weave together the facts and realities of economic poverty, racism, a devastated environment, the status of the world’s women and the pervasive violence that creates these tragic conditions.

Symbols of Our Critical Concerns

In the next three issues of ¡Viva! Mercy, we will explore the interconnectedness of immigration and four of our other critical concerns.

For the purpose of our discussion, each of our critical concerns has been illustrated in the design above.

Immigration: A path and traveling feet depict the migrant journey.

Earth: The globe symbolizes our commitment to preserving the environment.

Identity: A fingerprint denotes our focus on who we are.

Nonviolence: The dove and olive branch are a familiar reminder of our commitment to peace.

Women: A dancing figure evokes a joyful spirit of women and the feminine.

Racism: Interlocking hands indicate the effort to achieve racial awareness and harmony. These symbols, unified in the design, remind us that our critical concerns are living, moving together, overlapping and converging. Look for them on our website and printed materials where critical concerns are discussed.

Commitment to Service: Continuing Catherine’s Mission

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Public Statement on Immigration

"The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas strive to witness to Mercy by reverencing the dignity of each person, creating a spirit of hospitality, and pursuing integrity of word and deed in our lives. As an Institute, we recognize an urgent duty and challenge to stand in solidarity with immigrants seeking fullness of life.” Fourth Institute Chapter, 2005
Earth

Natural disasters devastate the land, driving people from their home countries. Environmental destruction leaves workers without livelihood, forcing them to look elsewhere for work.

Multinational corporations own much of the land once preserved for small farms and wild areas, depriving local peoples of their traditional means of livelihood.

Nonviolence

Domestic violence, war and civil strife force people to leave their homes in search of safety and peace.

Punitive enforcement measures and linking the threat of terrorism to immigration have contributed to anti-immigrant attitudes, implying that migrants are aliens, terrorists and felons.

Racism

Immigrants, migrants and refugees become “the other”—persons who are different from us. This stance violates their human dignity and their human rights.

The Community of Mercy has committed itself to deepen our response to the unrecognized and unreconciled racism past and present within our community. This mandate requires us to pay specific attention to our own behaviors and responses to immigrants, migrants and refugees.

Women

The United Nations reports that nearly half the world’s migrants are women, many of them with children.

Women and children are most vulnerable to the violence of migration—trafficking, rape, kidnapping and abuse. The majority of the estimated 500,000 to 2 million persons trafficked each year are women and girls.

Action

1. Talk to a person who has moved from one country to another. Listen to the experiences, feelings, joys and frustrations of that person’s journey.

2. Reflect on your own history of migration. When did you or your family arrive at your present home? What help or obstacles did you encounter along the way?

Resources

Justice for Immigrants
The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops sponsor this campaign and provide information, material for reflection and suggestions for action.

www.justiceforimmigrants.org

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good
This non-partisan organization is dedicated to promoting the fullness of Catholic social tradition in the public square.

www.catholicsinalliance.org

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
This is a network of grassroots organizations providing legal immigration services.

www.cliniclegal.org/

National Immigration Forum
The forum provides articles and information from around the U.S.

www.immigrationforum.org

"Yahweh, who does what is right, is always on the side of the oppressed."

Psalm 103: 6
Celina and her family lived in Quezon City in Metro Manila, Philippines. Their home was one rented room for three children and their parents, costing 200 pesos (U.S. $4.09) a month. Until her husband was hospitalized for a ruptured appendix, their life was hard and the children were undernourished, but they were together. But surgery, even in a government hospital, cost 30,000 pesos (U.S. $612) a day.

Celina went to a loan shark for money. Now in debt, she realized her only hope was to emigrate to America. She found an employment agency, completed the paperwork, but had to visit the loan shark for money for tickets and agency fees. Her sick husband and hungry children could not go with her.

Two months went by, debts increased, and Celina was heartbroken at the prospect of leaving her family. Before she was scheduled to leave, a required physical revealed that she was nine weeks pregnant. The employment agency would refuse her unless she terminated her pregnancy. Celina had to choose between losing her baby or going to prison for violating her contract. She chose abortion. For weeks afterward she hemorrhaged and her conscience gave her no peace.

Celina came to Texas and was hired as a domestic by a doctor and his family. The doctor gave her medications to stop the hemorrhaging, but she is still paying the agency and the loan sharks. She cries for her children and her husband, especially at night, even in her sleep.
**What Poverty Means to Immigrants**

Migration is a worldwide phenomenon and it is about poverty. Politicians and activists in the United States engage in carefully-worded arguments about what comprehensive immigration reform means, and how to deal with the situation. But while the rhetoric continues, desperately poor people—are leaving their homes, countries, children and all that is familiar in order to find a way to support themselves and their families.

As our technology and communications become more sophisticated, we see more clearly that global systems do not work for far too many people. Migration is about survival. It is about the haves and have-nots. Unscrupulous employers hire immigrants who are poor to work in inhumane conditions for unregulated wages so that goods in U.S. stores can be sold cheaply, and the comfortable can maintain their lifestyles. The U.N. has concluded that because most immigrants move to escape poverty, the growing gap between rich and poor nations will cause even more people to migrate.

According to journalist Charles Bowden: “For several decades our economic theology has outsourced not only American jobs but also the reality that most people on this planet must endure. We buy clothes made by children and comment on the good price…. The Third World has finally said hello and this time not even a wall will keep it silent or at bay.”

**Reflection**

Immigration challenges our very way of life. Immigrants like Celina refuse to watch their children starve. Her story challenges us to grow as spiritual human beings. Individual and corporate consumer practices continue to widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots, placing the idol of material gratification above concern for the common good.

Immigration is rooted in poverty, whether it originates from the causes of migration or from the struggle to find a better life in an unfamiliar land. Confronting injustice and the idolatry of materialism is difficult because it runs counter to what the marketplace teaches us about good economics. A bottom line culture is driven by spending, and thrives on corporate investments, whether or not they are socially responsible. Immigrants seeking a better life, and a society wanting to protect an unbridled lifestyle present an uncomfortable challenge. Which values will prevail?

**Action**

1. Talk to a person who has come from another country. Ask why she/he moved from home. How does her/his current life compare with the life left behind? What were the benefits of migrating? What were the sacrifices?

2. Spend some time in reflection with Celina. Could she have made different choices? What did she need that she did not have?

**THE TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND POVERTY**

- In 2005, there were 200 million migrants worldwide. According to the United Nations, 60 percent of all immigration represents people moving from poor developing nations to richer developed nations.
- The International Labor Organization reports that 185 million people around the world are unemployed and 550 million workers earn less than $1 a day. Half of the world’s 2.8 billion workers earn less than $2 a day.
- Migrants who move from low-income to high-income countries are often able to earn an income that is 20 to 30 times higher than they would be able to gain at home.

**Resources**


Catholic Campaign against Global Poverty
http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty/
Who Are These People?

These people are taking our jobs!
They don't pay taxes!
They don't speak our language!
These people are lazy—dirty—different!
They are not like us!
They are unwelcome!

You may not say these things but you’ve certainly heard them. Have you wondered: who are These People? Are They parishioners in the back pews, students in our schools, patients in our hospitals, salespersons, gardeners—the people next door?

This year approximately 20 million migrants and refugees are moving from their places of birth, triple the number estimated by the United Nations in 1990. As they move, they bring their cultures, their languages, and religions, and their differences. And why shouldn't they?

Emigrating implies losses, mourning, leaving behind. It tears apart people, families, communities. To leave one’s homeland is to die a little and the migrant becomes a foreigner, robbed of familiar surroundings and the culture that once protected him. He feels obliged to hide his differences in the new environment, to look for acceptance, a chance which is sometimes denied him by the country that hosts him. (Argentina presentation at Institute Justice Conference, 2007)

Raimundo came from Bolivia to a farm in the Argentine Patagonia. At first he worked for a farmer who refused to pay him; then he found work with Chinese people who manufactured bricks. He and his wife are now legal residents in Argentina, both working twelve hours a day to support their five children. Life is hard but Raimundo is grateful for the help of his neighbors. “Now I don’t feel like a foreigner,” he says, “but sometimes I find somebody who hates Bolivians.”

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries more than a million Europeans moved to Argentina. Today migrants looking for work come there from Korea, Japan, China and from the border countries of Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay and Peru. They live in the ethnic communities of Buenos Aires and work in textile factories. They are stigmatized for causing native unemployment and despised for their facial features and skin color.
Reflecting on Racism

Immigration challenges us on many levels, but the challenge of ethnicity and race penetrates to the deepest level of our identity. As people of Mercy we serve others, give to others, interact with others. But here we face perhaps the most difficult question: Do we accept These People totally and equally? In our ministries, do we regard ourselves as benefactors, dispensing charity? Do we really “love the alien who lives among us”?

“Never speak with contempt of any nation, profession or class of people.”
—Catherine McAuley

THE TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND RACISM

The United Nations has registered more than 100,000 Iraqi refugees and seeks long-term resettlement for 20,000 this year. But between October 2006 and May 31, 2007, the United States admitted just 701 Iraqi refugees.

Between 2000 and 2007, hate groups in the U.S. increased by 40 percent and Ku Klux Klan chapters by 63 percent. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, more than 840 hate groups exist in the U.S. (May 2007). Much of their hatred is focused against immigrants.

Resources
Brothers and Sisters to Us/Nuestros Hermanos y Hermanas.
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.
www.usccb.org/saac/bishopspastoral.shtml


“God is no respecter of persons and is not to be bribed; God secures justice for widows and orphans, and loves the aliens who live among you, giving them food and clothing. You too must love the stranger, for you once lived as aliens in Egypt.”
—Deuteronomy 10: 18-19

Reflection

- Reflect on the stories of immigrants in Scripture: Abraham and Sarah; Joseph, son of Isaac; the Israelites in the desert; Ruth, daughter-in-law of Naomi; the people of the Babylonian “exile;” “Esther,” the Holy Family: Were they accepted or rejected as they migrated? What do their stories and their identities as Israelites/Jewish people tell us about migrants today?

- Have we as the Mercy community and members of the Catholic Church accepted our history of migration and racism? What can you do personally to heal this wound?

Action

- Invite a recent immigrant for a meal. Ask what has been her/his experience of acceptance or rejection in her/his new home?

- Go to the Southern Poverty Law Center website, www.splcenter.org, then click on “Intelligence Project.” Read about immigration and racism and notice how it is said. Consider your response.
There are so many reasons why immigrants leave their home countries—poverty, war, famine, unemployment, persecution. Immigrants are often asked: “How could you leave your home?” They answer, “What else could I do when my land was taken, my home was destroyed, or my family simply couldn’t live there anymore?”

Pollution in Peruvian cities, deforestation in Guatemala, destruction of the coral reef in Belize—these attacks on Earth’s wellbeing link with other causes of migration. When a hurricane strikes Honduras or New Orleans, when a mudslide from denuded hills destroys a village in the Philippines, when the people who live in the rainforests of Guyana are driven from their homes by unlicensed logging companies—where do they go? How do they live? Here are some of their stories.

Simon works in a gold mine in the Philippines. He had owned a small farm where he lived with his family until the Philippine government gave the land rights to a Canadian-owned mining company. Simon and his family were forced to leave the land worked by their ancestors. Now the land he once farmed is so ravaged it will never again produce crops. Simon has developed breathing problems because the company provides inadequate protection in the mines and he cannot afford healthcare.

Sonia lived with her family in Chimbote, Peru. She struggled to breathe because of the emissions from the steel mill, the canning and fish factories. Leaving her family behind, Sonia moved into the jungle but she is unsafe and very lonely. Her brother emigrated to Spain, but his life too is difficult. The rest of the family still live in Chimbote, knowing the polluted air and water could someday kill them.

In every century people have left their homes because of natural disasters. “The whole world came to Egypt to buy corn from Joseph, so severe was the famine everywhere” (Genesis 41: 57).

In our time, negligence, greed, militarism, industrialism and unfair trade policies have added to Earth’s suffering, intensifying global warming, destroying the world’s forests, polluting the water and weakening Earth’s natural ability to restore itself.
Reflecting on Earth

On the 20th anniversary of their pastoral message *This Land Is Home to Me*, the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia wrote: “No one truly owns any part of creation. Rather all creation belongs only to God. We may be assigned to care for parts of it, but only if we serve the needs of others along with our own needs.” As we study the root causes of migration, we learn of blatant injustices that rob the poor of their land and rights and reward the rich with the spoils. The Mexican farmer who cannot sell his corn locally because imported U.S. corn is cheaper; the fisherfolk whose coastal waters have been depleted and their livelihood threatened, the indigenous people whose ancestral lands have been stolen and ravaged: these are the people who migrate in order to survive, populating the poorest sections of cities, crossing borders into dangerous territories, simply searching for work and a better life.

The grasp for natural resources is forcing dramatic shifts in how nations, corporations and individuals regard the common good, human rights and the preservation of our home, Earth.

As Mercy fulfills its promise “to stand in solidarity with immigrants” by serving those affected by the movement of people and by using its influence to achieve the reform of immigration policies, we must continually ask: Why are people migrating? Where is their home? How could they leave it? What are we doing to Earth—our home, their home? How can we help to correct the wrongs we see?

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“Let us never desire more than enough. God will give that and a blessing.”

---Catherine McAuley

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THE TRUTH ABOUT EARTH AND IMMIGRATION

In Argentina, over 6,000,000 acres of forests are destroyed annually in order to expand crops, mainly soy beans. Indigenous communities live in these forests.

Two U.S. corporations, Hunt Oil and Kellogg Brown and Root (a subsidiary of Halliburton) have nearly completed the Camisea Gas Project to extract gas from the Amazon and construct a cross-country pipeline through indigenous lands. This will destroy Peru’s rainforests and inevitably threaten the health and food security of indigenous peoples.

Six to seven tons of toxic waste result from the processes needed to mine one ounce of gold in the Philippines. Once the land is mined, it can no longer be used to grow crops. All vegetation is destroyed.

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Resources

At Home in the Web of Life. A Pastoral Message...from the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia. Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 1996.

Caring for God’s Creation. USCCB's Environmental Justice Program. www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/

The Earth Charter. Available in thirty languages. www.earthcharter.org/

Woman, What Do You Seek?

“She is a Moabite girl who has just come back with Naomi from the Moabite country. She asked if she might glean and gather among the swathes behind the reapers. She came and has been on her feet with hardly a moment’s rest from daybreak till now.”

—The Book of Ruth: 1, 5-7

Today her name is Teresa. She has come with her family from Panama... Tomorrow she is Pauline who is here with her husband from Guyana... Yesterday it was Grace who came with her children from Jamaica. Each one asks if she might be hired to work in the field harvesting tomatoes. She will be on her feet with hardly a moment’s rest from daybreak till sunset.

The story of Ruth continues as women worldwide move across borders to find work, seeking to feed and support their families. Sometimes they find welcome, friends and new homes. More often, they find danger, harassment and abuse.

Women now make up more than 50 percent of the immigrant population in Europe, Latin America and North America. Women and children make up 75 percent of the casualties of war. Women represent 48 percent of legal migrants and 42 percent of unauthorized migrants to the United States. They find work as domestics, caregivers, garment workers, agricultural workers. They earn an average of 22 percent less than men and have less access to credit.
**Reflecting on Women**

The Moabite woman Ruth walks among us every day. Like the Ruth of Scripture, she says to her family: Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people and your God my God.

Today Ruth comes from Honduras, Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Bosnia, Mexico, Rwanda and Afghanistan. Often she comes undernourished, traumatized by war, rape, violence, poverty and disease. She may be the woman preparing food in the hospital kitchen, caring for sisters in our retirement homes, sewing shirts in our factories or tending the children in the day care center. She may be the woman next door.

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**THE TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND WOMEN**

Approximately 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year. Eighty percent are female; up to half are minors. This figure does not include people trafficked within countries for labor and sexual slavery.

Of the world’s 1.3 billion poor, 70 percent are women. Two-thirds of the world’s women are illiterate.

Immigrant women often suffer high rates of battering because they have less access to legal and social services, or they are afraid to contact the authorities because of their undocumented status. Those who attempt to flee may not have access to bilingual shelters, financial assistance or food.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, 90 percent of workers in the U.S. garment industry are women, and over 50 percent of the garment factories are sweatshops. The maquiladoras in Mexico employ mostly single young women who work for as little as $0.50 an hour six days a week, often up to 75 hours a week with no overtime pay.

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"Whatever be the station [women] are destined to fill, their example and advice will always possess influence."

—Catherine McAuley

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**Action**

The Sisters of Mercy have always ministered to women in need. How do Mercy ministries today seek out and minister to immigrant women?

The Institute Justice Conference in 2007 asked each sister, associate and companion to accompany an immigrant, a person who is migrating or someone left behind by family members migrating. Find ways to accompany someone by contacting organizations including:

- **Catholic Charities**  
  [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/immigration/)

- **Catholic Relief Services**  
  [www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org)

- **Resources**
  - **The Line in the Sand: Stories from the US/Mexico Border.**  
    DVD available from Catholic Relief Services.  
    [www.crs.org/dramaproject/](http://www.crs.org/dramaproject/)
  - **Stop Trafficking! Anti-Human Trafficking Newsletter.**  
    Co-sponsored by Mercy International Justice Network.  

- **Women for Women International.**  
  This organization “envisions a world where no one is abused, poor, illiterate or marginalized.”  
  [www.womenforwomen.org](http://www.womenforwomen.org)
The Story of Another Mary—A Refugee

As she stumbled along the road to the refugee camp in Sudan, Mary could not help seeing burned and mutilated bodies of children, animals and neighbors from her village. No one was trying to bury the bodies; most fellow travelers did not seem to notice them. Like the others, Mary walked in a state of shock. Her family had been killed, her village burned and the crops destroyed, and Mary had been raped. Mary has no home, no family, no means of support. Mary is a refugee, one of the survivors.

At the end of 2006, the number of refugees in the world was more than 14 million. The number of conflict-related internally displaced people such as Mary, who had not crossed international borders, was estimated at 24.5 million. Militarism and terrorism wreak havoc especially on the most vulnerable, causing people to flee their homes in search of peace and safety. Thus the stream of refugees across the world grows.

Violence destroyed Mary’s home, and the lives of her family and neighbors. War and genocide drive millions of people from their homes each day. Domestic violence, a more hidden menace, drives an unknown number to seek protection and safety. Other forms of violence—intolerance, deliberate destruction, persecution because of religion, race, sexual orientation or political affiliation—force people to leave their homes, families and villages to seek safety elsewhere. After four years, more than 400,000 Sudanese have been murdered but the international community stands helpless to stop the violence.
Reflecting on Nonviolence

The ancient litany of war and violence goes on: Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Lebanon, Colombia, Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan. In 2005, the United States sold $11.6 billion worth of weapons, 70.2 percent going to developing countries. The killing continues; the flood of refugees increases.

As a community of peace, the Sisters of Mercy publicly oppose the war in Iraq. At the 2005 Institute Chapter, citing “the proliferation of violence” as a root cause of migration, they committed themselves to welcome and serve those whose lives have been shattered by violence. Mercy ministries throughout the Institute are providing assistance to refugees from national, international and domestic violence.

Violence underlies almost all our Critical Concerns. The violence of racism attacks the dignity of a person. The violence of environmental destruction assaults the very life of the planet on which we live. Violence against women saturates our media, our language, our culture. Until we address violence as a foremost cause of immigration, Mary will continue to wander the roads of the world, looking for safety, looking for home.

“Jesus Christ declared that he would consider as done to Himself whatever should be done unto [the poor].”
—Catherine McAuley

The sound of violence shall be heard no longer in your land, or ruin and devastation within your borders.”
—Isaiah 60: 18

Action

- Does your parish or community participate in the Global Solidarity Partnership Program, sponsored by Catholic Relief Services? Learn how to provide support and assistance to others.
  www.crs.org全球化solidarity
- Gather a group to work for peace in ways that are practical, creative, inclusive and nonviolent. For group process, use Traveling with the Turtle to emphasize women’s spirituality and peacemaking.
  http:/paceebene.org/pace/traveling-with-the-turtle-book

Resources

- Called to Something New: A Peoples’ Peace Initiative. A booklet available in Spanish and English, this process reflects on the challenges for Catholic peacemaking in the 21st century. Pax Christi USA.
  www.paxchristiusa.org
  www.livesforsale.com
- Protecting Creation
  www.ProtectingCreation.org

THE TRUTH ABOUT NONVIOLENCE AND IMMIGRATION

The most recent report from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees states that 2.1 million Afghans live outside their homeland, followed by 1.5 million Iraqis, 686,000 Sudanes, 460,000 Somalis, and 400,000 each from Congo and Burundi.

Between 50,000 and 100,000 Iraqis flee their country every month; 4.3 million Palestinians have left their country in recent years.