



International Solidarity Reflection

Migration

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Introduction

Life often demands a balance between journey, either inward or outward, and rootedness, with a chance to grow in one's own home, the native soil of one's bioregion. Although migration may be an internal or an external necessity, it should lead to the security of a home where life can flourish.

Call to Prayer

We pray for the awareness to see the other as subject rather than object and to honor the inherent value of each. We pray for imagination, so that we can recognize the many faces of migration and be united with "the other" in the solidarity of prayer and action.

Experience

"Invisible laborers": Often employers ask no questions in return for a pliant labour force without the protection of minimum standards of pay and working conditions. The UN estimates that there are 20-30 million undocumented global migrants. Whether documented or not, the jobs available to migrant workers tend to be those rejected by the local population, often being described as "3D" (dirty, dangerous and difficult). Many migrant workers are professionals who take on jobs that do not utilize their full skills and potential. (UN Human Development Report 2009)

Women: "The story of migration, as it has traditionally been told, has been a masculine epic. But in the latter part of the 20th century, as women began immigrating in ever-growing numbers, the migration story became increasingly a woman's tale as well. Women are now on the move as much as men. But they are migrating not as lone individuals but as members, even heads of families, determined to keep family bonds intact ... Women now make up more than half of the migrant population worldwide." ("Women Immigrants: Stewards of the 21st Century", New America Media)

Furred, feathered, and finned: Driven by an inherent need for migration, the inner necessity to carry on life, millions of birds, some from as far away as New Zealand, 7,000 miles distant, travel every year to refuges in Alaska. From the east, a herd of 100,000 caribou embarks on its annual migration to bear the next generation. Three salmon species travel up to 2,000 miles to their spawning areas. Hundreds of species must migrate in order to survive, but global warming, oil and gas drilling, roads, and dams now threaten their routes. (Wilderness Society)

Forever moving: "Conflicts are getting more worrisome and more difficult to solve; the numbers of refugees and internally displaced people aren't decreasing.... We're witnessing new trends of forced displacement. A refugee in the traditional vision is someone who flees from one country to another because of persecution or conflict. But what we're witnessing now is a number of mega-trends interacting with one another: population growth,

urbanization, food insecurity, water scarcity, climate change, and conflict. More and more people are on the move for reasons that are sometimes difficult to differentiate. If a Somali crosses the Gulf of Aden, is it because of the conflict or because [there are no] jobs? Probably both. Climate change [also] enhances conflict. If resources become scarce, people tend to fight for them. This is increasing the number of people on the move and the number of people forced to move.” (Antonio Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees)

Reflection

Lost childhood: “Immigrant children grow up fast, and carry a stress that usually only adults feel. Growing up, I recall my mother hardly being at home. She left for work at ten in the morning and returned home at eleven at night. It wasn't that my mother was neglecting me; she was stuck at her low-paying job because we are undocumented. The stress that I felt growing up was that of an adult. I had to cook, clean and look after myself, starting at the age of 7. I blamed myself for wanting toys and extra little goodies that all children want.” (Youth Commentary, New America Media)

Lost cultural identity: “Any kind of displacement is a big issue in Pacific island culture, which links identity to land,” said Marstella Jack, a Micronesian former attorney-general. It is estimated that Micronesia's low-lying islands will be submerged by 2030. “Our identity is tied to the tiny island we are from ... losing the land is losing our survival, because the very sense of survival is that piece of land,” she said. For those watching the water slowly rise around their homes, climate change is no longer about economics. “The world is thinking about trade. But that's not what climate change is about – it's about us living, not drowning,” said Jack. (Climate Action Network, New America Media)

Lost species: The American pika, a tiny, five-ounce cousin of the rabbit, is uniquely suited to live in cold, mountainous conditions and can die if forced to endure extended exposure to temperatures as mild as 78 degrees. As global warming melts snowpack and rising temperatures make more of its dwindling habitat inhospitable, the pika is expected to seek higher elevations or migrate northward. However, already living on high-elevation islands, pikas cannot move any higher. In short, life-saving migration is not an option; some lower level populations have already disappeared. As temperatures continue to rise, where will the pikas go once they reach the mountain top? (World Wildlife Fund and National Wildlife Federation)

Action

Practice seeing life from the perspective of a migrant: choose an individual from a country, culture, race, or species that is not your own and spend just five minutes imagining that individual's experiences: needs, hopes, fears, challenges. Choose a different individual every day for a week.

Read a book or article that deals with the experience of migration. Think of three different causes for migration. Since we are all connected, consider if your choices and way of life contribute to the migration of others and to the resulting hardships.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, you are the Way.

Guide all migrants through parched deserts, rough seas, tangled jungle,
high winds, pouring rain, and the harshness of inhospitable lands and people
to a safe home and the promise of new Life. Amen.