



This is the eighth in a series of articles by the CCK Hispanic Committee on the **Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform** which aims to reach beyond the networks of the participating national agencies, and to enlist the support of Catholic individuals and institutions in dioceses throughout the country.

Visit [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org) for more information. Le invitamos a visitar nuestra página con regularidad, debido a que se estará actualizando constantemente con materiales, noticias relevantes y otra información que esperamos sea de su utilidad.

## KY Catholic Dioceses Reach Out to Immigrants

By Sr. Regina Marie Baker, CDP

The four Catholic Dioceses of Covington, Lexington, Louisville, and Owensboro, Kentucky have been involved in helping immigrants and refugees for many years. Why would the Church in our Commonwealth have an interest in welcoming and befriending strangers? The resettlement and support for the general well-being of those who must leave their country of origin stems from God's call in the Old Testament, "So you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt." (Dt. 10:19) And in a more recent document, *Ecclesia In America 1999 #65*, Pope John Paul II states that the Church "is committed to spare no effort in developing her own pastoral strategy among immigrant people, in order to help them settle in their new land and to foster a welcoming attitude among the local population in the belief that a mutual openness will bring enrichment to all."

The Resurrection of Christ was the climax to Jesus' mission of teaching and healing. That same mission was given to the Church on Pentecost. "The triumph of grace in the Resurrection of Christ plants hope in the hearts of all believers, and the Spirit works in the Church to unite all peoples of all races and cultures into the one family of God." (Ephesians 2:17-20)

It is not unusual for people who join together in a common purpose to formulate a statement of their mission. Church communities are a good example of this. An organization's Mission Statement gives others an insight into the group's identity and values. Each of the four Dioceses of Kentucky has a Mission Statement and out of this self-description flows the pastoral services provided within those regions.

The Church of the Diocese of Covington embraces the value of the sanctity of all human life and creation and commits itself to compassion and active support for the poor and oppressed. The diocese responded wholeheartedly to the plight of Vietnamese refugees in 1975 and had a Resettlement Program for about fifteen years.

To coordinate efforts on behalf of Spanish speaking immigrants in the Northern Kentucky area, Bishop Roger

Foys established the parish of Cristo Rey, in Erlanger. Soon thereafter, Fr. John Cahill and Sr. Juana Mendez S.C. established **Centro de Amistad** for social outreach programs in the

parish. These programs include: English as a Second Language, Intensive English, GED preparation, citizenship classes, a home buyers program, a low income tax clinic, a job clearing house, carpenter and electrician apprenticeship programs, referral services for family counseling and legal services, a family computer training program.

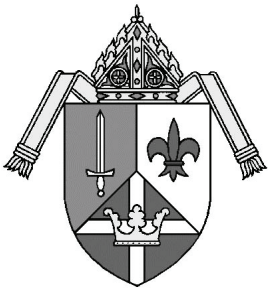
Health issues are a high priority and in response to these the parish will add a full time health advocate to the parish staff in July, 2006. This is in addition to the "Promotores de Salud" (Health promoters) program and an annual health fair. The parish is able to provide these services on Church premises because they partner with other agencies whose assistance is deeply appreciated. These include: Gateway Community College, Northern Kentucky University, Kenton County Public Library, Area Health Education Council, Catholic Social Services, Northern Kentucky Home Builders Association, Children's Hospital of Cincinnati, and others.

Pastoral services for Hispanics are also coordinated through the Catholic Churches in Carrollton and Maysville, Kentucky. Popular religiosity is part of the fabric of a people's identity and so, in parishes like St. John the Evangelist in Carrollton, much attention is given to religious traditions to help first generation Catholic immigrants adjust to life in the United States. These traditions include: an outdoor Way of the Cross around the town that culminates in the Good Friday service in both Spanish and English, bilingual religious celebrations for Christmas, Ash Wednesday, and Easter Vigil, and forty nights of prayer in preparation for December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. On December 11, the celebration of the feast includes a procession first by car, then on foot to Church where Mass and a fiesta are celebrated until 11 p.m. The hour before midnight is a time of prayer that ends with the singing of "Las Mañanitas", a traditional hymn that greets the dawn of the feast in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The Church of the Diocese of Lexington identifies itself as "a diverse pilgrim people" and "In response to our baptismal call...we reach out to all, especially those who are poor in the eyes of the world..." The Diocese challenges itself as a pilgrim



Covington



Lexington

people to journey with immigrants who are also a pilgrim people and, being strangers in a world vastly different from their country of origin, are often considered poor in the estimation of the world.

**Jesús, el Buen Pastor Centro Católico** provides a number of pastoral services for Hispanics in Lexington and provides a Catholic environment where people can feel comfortable with symbols of their faith.

Among the activities hosted at the Center are youth group activities, Spanish classes, ESL classes, GED classes, classes to learn more about the Bible and the Catholic faith, and a women's group "Damas". This latter group has a renovated apartment where women learn sewing, crafts, and cake decorating. It is a place of shared interests and values.

Eighteen Churches in the Diocese of Lexington offer Mass and some religious celebrations throughout the year. The rural parishes provide a place where people involved in agriculture and factory work can turn for help to learn or understand English, to have someone interpret in medical or other emergencies, and to find fellowship with other immigrants scattered throughout the counties. In Montgomery County, there is a Migrant Coalition out of the Extension Office in which people of the parish join with health care workers, teachers, and local employers in order to seek ways to provide better services to individuals and families.

In some of the larger parishes of the Lexington Diocese, the numbers of Hispanics make it feasible to have full-time bilingual pastoral staff to provide leadership formation programs, prayer and Bible study groups, youth and young adult ministry, retreats for couples. The Diocesan Hispanic Pastoral Plan clearly outlines action steps that can be taken to strengthen the values and utilize the talents of the people.

The Church of the Archdiocese of Louisville, "striving for fullness of life in God," accepts a mission to serve "human needs, especially those of the poor and oppressed...fostering justice and reconciliation among all God's people."



Louisville

Catholic Charities of Louisville has a Migration and Refugee Services program in which volunteers help set up apartments for new families and a mentors program which helps new arrivals learn English and familiarizes them with community services such as libraries, parks, bus services, as well as introducing immigrants to local ways of shopping, cleaning, and preparing foods.

Volunteers also help with day care while immigrant family members attend ESL classes, help prepare "Welcome Baskets", or help unload trucks that carry donations of furniture, household items, food and hygiene items.

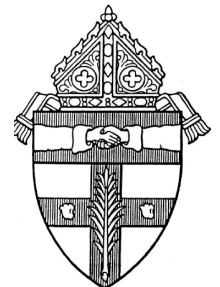
There are fourteen parishes in the Archdiocese of Louisville that formally serve the pastoral needs of immigrants. Saint John Vianney parish offers support to the Vietnamese

community. The other parishes offer a variety of pastoral services to Hispanics that include medical assistance in the form of translators and transportation to medical appointments, social services such as food, clothing, ESL classes, women's support groups, and day care services. Eleven of these Churches have Spanish Masses.

Epiphany Church is one of many that supports Eastern Area Community Ministries, an ecumenical ministry that helps people in need. This group established Latino Outreach Services in 2003. A parish grant helps to pay the salary of the director of this program. The parishioners of Epiphany Church are integral to Latino Outreach Services, helping to provide transportation for clients and a variety of other needs. Because of the addition of the bi-lingual director, Eastern Area Community Ministries can now offer assistance with food, clothing, rent, utilities, and special needs for infants, regardless of the immigration status of the individual or family.

Saint Rita Catholic Church has a community outreach person who helps people find jobs, offers interpreting services for medical care and to enroll children in school, refers people for legal assistance, and offers English classes. The parish has a summer camp in Spanish for children, an Academy that teaches dance and acting, advocacy for justice for immigrants, assistance with immigration papers when possible, training for catechists, annual retreats, a prayer group and an AA group.

The Church of the Diocese of Owensboro affirms "that Jesus left the faith community - called Church - to carry on His mission into time." The people commit themselves not only to proclaim and celebrate God's love, but also to reach out "to all God's children, especially those who have special needs, e.g. the homeless, lonely, sick, hungry, etc.," thus putting love and faith into action.



Owensboro

The Diocese of Owensboro serves the western portion of the state. Patricia Murphy, Director of Hispanic Ministry, summed up the pastoral services presently available for Hispanic immigrants in this way: "There are thirteen parishes that offer Mass and varying levels of educational and outreach services. These include: catechesis in Spanish with trained Hispanic catechists, Bible study and Prayer groups, youth groups and a young missionaries post-confirmation group, interpreting services, leadership formation through committees and councils, response to physical needs through St. Vincent de Paul groups and Hispanic ministers, advocacy in the larger community through ministerial associations, community organizations and agencies, and local government."

In addition to the parishes, there are four centers. **La Plaza Immigrant Community Center** in Owensboro offers an ESL program, a women's group, community organizing, leadership formation, computer skills, health education and screenings. This Center is run by an ecumenical non-profit group and helps connect immigrants to the community.

The **International Center** in Bowling Green is a resource

center for immigrants and refugees that helps with immigration applications, interpretation, and community resources.

**La Casa de Migrante** in Paducah offers ESL classes, interpretation services and general community awareness.

The newest center, **HOLA** in Todd County, also offers ESL classes, advocacy in the community, help with immediate needs and outreach to migrants in this rural area.

The Bishops commend Church communities that have established migrant shelters that provide appropriate pastoral and social services to migrants. The Church encourages dioceses to sponsor pertinent social services for migrants and immigrants, particularly affordable legal services. In many rural dioceses, the primary site of pastoral outreach for farm workers is the migrant camp, usually at a significant distance from the parish church. In this context we encourage local parishioners to be prepared as home missionaries and the migrants themselves to be prepared as catechists and outreach workers.

All four of the Dioceses of Kentucky have been active in promoting "Justice for Immigrants", an initiative of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, to strive for reform of Immigration Laws. In a letter to Senators Mitch McConnell and Jim

Bunning on March 9, 2006, the Bishops urged comprehensive reform that will address the roots causes of immigration, such as global poverty; provide a temporary worker program with appropriate protections for both U.S. and foreign workers; restore due process for immigrants; and keep families intact.

Borrowing phrases from the Mission Statements of the Catholic Dioceses of Kentucky we might summarize by saying: Being a diverse pilgrim people ourselves, we assert that Jesus calls the Church to carry on His mission in time. We value the sanctity of all human life that seeks its fullness in God. In response to our baptismal call, we reach out to all and commit ourselves to compassion and active support of those who are considered poor in the estimation of the world. Our hope is to foster justice and reconciliation among all God's people.

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Action: Join Catholic Conference of KY's legislative advocacy network to influence immigration public policy, [www.ccky.org](http://www.ccky.org).

Bishops call on the local church to help newcomers integrate in ways that are respectful, that celebrate their cultures, and that are responsive to their social needs, leading to a mutual enrichment of the local church.



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*The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.*