

# **Undocumented Evangelism: Immigration, Detention, and Sanctuary on the U.S.-Mexican Border**

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## **Introduction**

The Sacred Heart Catholic Church was full to bursting one Monday evening in August of 2015. Parishioners, families, and reporters lined each pew, leaning forward excitedly for the arrival of their champion. Finally, his image was projected onto a giant screen: Pope Francis greeted the church with a warm smile and began a message on the unity of mankind. Sacred Heart Catholic Church serves the community of McAllen, Texas, a small city on the U.S.-Mexican border. The Pope's presence there was no mistake: from the first days of his papacy in 2013, Pope Francis has spoken passionately about undocumented immigration, but not with the conservative line one might expect. Instead, the Pope expressed his desire to enter the U.S. during his 2015 tour by way of the U.S.-Mexican border to showcase his support and solidarity with undocumented immigrants and refugees who had made the journey (*Rolling Stone* 2015). He has even been pejoratively referred to by more conservative members of his faith as a "cafeteria Catholic" for his tendency to associate with the common man, but his consistency in doing so demonstrates his dedication to those below him in the Catholic hierarchy (*Rolling Stone* 2015). In just such a show of solidarity with his people, Pope Francis spent an hour encouraging the parishioners of Sacred Heart via Skype. He listened to a handful of stories from recent undocumented immigrants and told them to be courageous in the face of adversity. Perhaps most touchingly, the Pope then called a single nun to the front of the church. Sister Norma Pimentel, the overseer of the church's work with Catholic Charities, a multi-tiered, nationwide organization that provides for various

groups of needy and vulnerable people, later related that the experience was a complete surprise: the Pope told her how proud he was of the work she did with undocumented immigrants and even that he loved her. The Pope's adulation, which Sister Pimentel described as "so unexpected," expressed his happiness at the church's collective efforts to aid those in their community, saying he was, "so pleased that everyone was giving of themselves" (personal interview, 2017). Sister Pimentel is a member of one of many churches and cities across the U.S. that has begun to offer aid and sanctuary to undocumented immigrants in light of the current presidential administration. This study defines these efforts as "undocumented evangelism" and attempts to situate them in the context of U.S.-Mexican border relations, the precedent of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s, President Trump, Pope Francis, and the daily actions of the common man.

Undocumented evangelism is not for praise. It is not for recognition. It may be easily ignored, but it is truly influential in the lives of those who receive it. It refers to the tireless efforts of those who feel religiously compelled to respond to the struggles of undocumented immigrants in whatever ways they can. This paper in particular focuses on the provision of sanctuary to persons otherwise rejected by both the economic or political circumstances of their native country and the legal systems of the U.S. The word evangelism means, in its most basic form, the spreading of a message, and in this context, that message is one of inclusion, understanding, and support. The daily efforts of ordinary people to provide for undocumented immigrants in need plant the seeds of brotherly love in churches, communities, cities, and countries, without asking for praise. In return, these undocumented evangelists invite others to join them in their humble, repetitive, and

exhausting efforts to improve the lives of others. This research paper intends in part to highlight the voices of these activists and demonstrate the power of everyday people to change the opinions and circumstances of those around them.

### **An Overview of U.S.-Mexican Border History**

U.S.-Mexican relations effectively began after Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821. Although Spain's distance from its colonial possession made this struggle easier, the Mexican governmental body had trouble reinventing itself after nearly three hundred years of foreign rule. As Mexico attempted to develop their country and control their vast territory, which stretched from its modern-day territory all the way to the U.S.'s current northernmost border, the U.S. was expanding westward. Texas was a dramatic manifestation of this frantic expansion: in 1836, colonists declared Texas' independence, wresting territory from both the Mexican and the U.S. government in a series of armed conflicts. As the U.S.'s fervor to increase its land holdings gained more momentum, settlers migrated in ever greater numbers westward, coming into contact with Native American tribes and citizens of Mexico's northern territories, and in 1846, these encounters broke into the U.S.-Mexican war. Mexico's forces were spread too thin, however. In 1848, the Mexican government signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ceded their vast northern territories to the United States in exchange for \$15 million. This included California, Utah, Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, a fraction of Wyoming, and most of Arizona. The rest of the latter state became U.S. territory as part of another treaty in 1853.

The political status of the Mexicans living in these newly lost lands had abruptly changed. They had not crossed any border, but a border had crossed them, and for many

years, this posed little problem for the families whose citizenship had been split in two. During the latter half of the 1800s and the beginning of the next century, the U.S.-Mexican border was quite porous. When Porfirio Díaz established himself as Mexico's dictator in 1876, he encouraged U.S. business ventures with generous tax cuts and promoted the construction of thousands of miles of railways to connect Mexico's vast territory. These advancements came at a cost, however, as the dictatorship silenced its opponents and forwarded its own agenda at the behest of compromise. In 1910, the Mexican Revolution erupted, propelling a wave of migrants northwards to escape the violence of the conflict. The cheap labor these migrants provided was roundly encouraged by U.S. politicians and business owners, especially when World War I decimated the workforce. The end of the war, as well as the Great Depression, resulted in the first of a series of repatriations of Mexican migrants. Their low wages already made them vulnerable to economic fluctuations, and when the companies that had hired them during the war needed to cut costs, the newest hired were the first to be fired. Mexicans, providers of cheap labor, shouldered the blame of a struggling economy. This, combined with the U.S.'s budding xenophobia after WWI culminated in restrictions at the border and deportations throughout the country.

The same pattern played out thirty-five years later, when the U.S. established the Bracero Program, a program created to draw large quantities of cheap labor into the country rapidly. Again, U.S. businesses sought to eliminate the labor shortage brought on by a world war, and the 4.5 million Mexicans they hired during the 1940s and 1950s, many only seasonally, were paid and treated poorly in the workplace. When World War II ended and the white male labor force clamored for jobs, the participants in the Bracero

Program had trouble remaining in the country, since the program did not provide permanent residency. During the beginning of the Cold War, the U.S. fear and isolationism led to another wave of repatriations that forced many workers to return to Mexico jobless (Henderson, 2011).

The intricate history of the two nations, as well as the repeated acceptance and rejection of Mexicans into the U.S., has created a sort of selective porousness that the U.S.-Mexican border maintains to this day. Despite the efforts of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, there are estimated to be as many as twelve million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. today. The histories of these immigrants go beyond that of U.S.-Mexican relations, however, into the dangerous territory of civil war the haze of political entanglement.

This history plays an important role in the politics of today. A precedent has been set; immigrants are accepted and rejected nearly every generation, but before the Sanctuary Movement, the burden of these fluctuations was born predominantly on the shoulders of the immigrants that suffered through them. A new combination of social and political factors, however, broke that chain soon after the end of WWII, propelling the US into a new era of political activism by and for undocumented immigrants and their families.

### **The Sanctuary Movement**

Immigration has been a contentious topic in the United States since the nation's inception. Dark and difficult times in the country's history have nearly unfailingly been coupled with sharp focus on a corresponding group of immigrants as U.S. citizens sought

to displace their fear and anger onto an identifiable other (even if at times those targets were also citizens). After the solidification of the modern day U.S.-Mexican border in the 1853, Mexicans have found themselves in this unenviable position many times.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ebbs and flows of economic prosperity were echoed in the inclusion and exclusion of waves of Mexican immigrants through work programs and repatriation. The complexity of U.S.-Mexican history at the border has remained sensitive and intricate to this day, most notably with regards to undocumented immigrants.

Undocumented immigration has been the center of vigorous debate for three decades. During the 1980s, a series of civil wars in Central America prompted the migration of thousands of Latin Americans to the U.S., sparking what came to be known as the Sanctuary Movement.

The Sanctuary Movement has its roots in the political and social unrest of the 1960s and 70s. In the U.S., Civil Rights activists and protestors of the Vietnam War were feverishly advocating against human rights violations at home and abroad, promoting the voices of those who believed in the righteousness of their agenda. This climate certainly contributed to the development of the Sanctuary Movement, which may not otherwise have had the momentum it did. In the midst of the protests and demonstrations of these decades, Central America was experiencing a series of devastating civil wars. In El Salvador, peasants who demanded land, food, and basic rights were silenced by their government. Many victims of the dictatorial regime were religious members of the community, particularly of the Catholic Church, who spoke out against the clear violations of their dignity by an ineffective and corrupt government. Likewise, the citizens of Guatemala and Honduras were suffering a similar fate under military

dictatorships. Catholics in the U.S. became aware of the situation in 1980, when four North American Catholic women in El Salvador who had been implicated in the protests were subsequently shot. It also became increasingly difficult to ignore the influx of refugees from these war-torn countries. However, many of these Central American men, women, and children were not initially recognized as refugees if they were not personally being persecuted, according to the U.S.'s legal definition of a refugee.

The Sanctuary Movement gained its true momentum when, after the death of the four North American Catholics, other U.S. citizens began to ask questions about the roots of the Central American civil wars. They discovered that the U.S. government was providing funding and weapons to the governments of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, which were being used to perpetuate the wars at the terrible expense of the countries' citizens. With the Cold War came the U.S. government's all-permeating fear of communism, and in the name of democracy President Ronald Reagan funneled support and supplies to Central America to keep their governments from aligning with Russia. This tactic was cripplingly flawed, as became ever clearer as refugees flooded the border with horror stories of the atrocities they had endured during their escape. Even only the very first testimony of two refugees, Pedro and Sylvia, written in *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad* paints a terrifying picture:

I [Sylvia] was instructed to take the testimony of one of the women. She told me the security forces came into her home, beat her son, and raped her daughter.

While I was typing this testimony, an explosion went off in the front of the building...One side of the office collapsed and several persons were wounded. I was frightened, confused, and hardly able to speak...Three unidentified dead

bodies, covered with acid, had been thrown on top of the rubble. On top of the bodies, a noth signed by the death squad stated, ‘This is going to happen to you all’” (Golden and McConnel, 1986).

The U.S. support of the warfare was the backbone of the Sanctuary Movement. Although providing sanctuary to undocumented immigrants was illegal, the first churches who opened their doors to this population justified their decision by pointing out the moral debt the U.S. owed as a primary contributor to the destruction that had forced them north.

Numerous cities and institutions during this time sheltered undocumented refugees and opposed governmental efforts to deport them, beginning with efforts of the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona and its pastor-turned-coyote, Jim Corbett, and rippling outwards to other churches in the West. Author María Christina García described these initial rebellions against U.S. law in her article “Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States; ‘Dangerous Times Call for Risky Responses’: Latino Immigration and Sanctuary, 1981-2001.” She wrote about Jim Corbett’s tireless efforts, alongside his parish, to develop a string of secure houses like the Underground Railroad in which undocumented migrants and refugees could seek shelter. These houses perfectly demonstrated undocumented evangelism: “It was rank-and-file volunteers in individual communities...who engaged in the riskiest activities...sheltering refugees or transporting them to safe houses or across the border to Canada” (García, 2005). These churches claimed that protecting these populations was a moral obligation. Corbett himself was adamant about his motivation: “You have to do something as a Christian,” García recorded him stating. “We were caught between the laws of man and the laws of God. I chose the laws of God” (García, 2005). Southside Presbyterian sparked a



movement that challenged the validity of U.S. legislation, and their voices were finally heard in 1986, when President Ronald Reagan granted amnesty to all undocumented immigrants who had entered the U.S. before 1982. As the dust settled in Central America during the 1990s and refugees and activists celebrated their victory, the Sanctuary Movement slowed.

### **Undocumented Immigration and the New Sanctuary Movement**

Nearly twenty years later, however, a second effort began to offer asylum to a different wave of undocumented immigrants. Unlike the first group of migrants, those currently seeking safety in the New Sanctuary Movement are of diverse national, social, and economic backgrounds, but they all seek asylum against the uncertainty with which they are confronted in their native countries. President Obama's strict immigration policy and Donald Trump's election, campaign promises, and subsequent executive orders have struck fear into the hearts of the eleven million undocumented immigrants who have established their lives here. The U.S., although less directly politically involved as it was in the 1980s, now relies heavily upon the work of these millions of citizens. The efforts of sanctuary states, cities, counties, and churches provide for this population, a crucial role in an uncertain future. The current political administration preaches its desire to detain and deport as many undocumented immigrants as possible, but the detention centers in which they are held – sometimes for years – are unjust. Though this is undeniably the case, “sanctuary cities” are being threatened with funding cuts for attempting to provide more humane housing for these people. This is the importance of undocumented evangelism, the efforts by local churches and communities to feed and house fearful undocumented immigrants, even when it means violating federal law

mandating that undocumented persons be reported to Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers. The continued grassroots involvement of individual churches in the New Sanctuary Movement, especially those which minister outside of the bounds of sanctuary states, counties, and cities, is a moral necessity in the nationwide, though sporadic, effort to disrupt the unjust detainment system which stems from inadequate immigration policy. Closer examination both of the New Sanctuary Movement and the current processes of detainment, within the historical scope of Pope Francis' groundbreaking papacy and Donald Trump's controversial administration, clearly demonstrates the value of undocumented evangelism as a crucial component of future immigration reform.

Undocumented immigrants of today are facing a situation whose similarities and differences to that of the 1980s warrants careful consideration. The most obvious difference between these two time periods is the lack of outright civil war in Central America. Although drug-related crime is conspicuous, violent, and consistent, it is not the same as civil war, and the U.S. could argue that its hands are cleaner than they were thirty years ago with regards to these conflicts. And yet, undocumented immigrants have been the center of the same vigorous debate. They are subjected to the same scrutiny as before, but the comparative political stability (untrustworthy, but not blatantly war-torn) of Central America and Mexico has sparked protest in the "anti-illegal alien" camp. If many refugees in the 1980s did not qualify as refugees under the legal terminology of the Constitution, then today's undocumented immigrants certainly do not. The reasons for their arrivals are many: some are fleeing gang-related crime and violence, some from crippling poverty, some from hunger and thirst. The U.S., for those willing to make the

arduous journey north, still promises safety and prosperity, at least in comparison to other realities. However, especially in the case of those who enter the U.S. in hopes of finding a better-paying job, undocumented immigrants often encounter sharp rejection by U.S. citizens on a number of grounds (grounds which are often not founded on objective fact). Instead of presenting these various arguments, this study is interested in the involvement of the U.S. in processes that draw undocumented immigrants across the border. In the 1980s, as has been discussed, U.S. financial and military involvement in Central American civil wars compelled churches and cities to accept undocumented immigrants as a moral obligation, but the intricacies of the present day's dilemmas do not lend themselves as easily to a direct moral link between U.S. action and policy and undocumented immigration. These links, however, are still very real. With the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994, import and export taxes between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico were eliminated, but instead of strengthening ties between the three countries, Mexico's agricultural sectors could not compete with the low prices of grain flooding in from the U.S., and small farms suffered huge losses. As a result, large numbers of unemployed Mexicans sought economic shelter in the U.S., seeing no alternative way to feed their families. The jobs they took were most often on seasonal farms or within the agricultural sector, jobs with long hours and little pay. U.S. companies were all too eager bend their policies to allow for cheap Mexican labor, but they were equally willing to part with these employees as quickly as they had hired them in order to avoid legal scrutiny. Undocumented immigrants' vulnerability could be used against them, held over their heads to force them to live and work in unsafe and unjust conditions.

## **Detention Centers**

The U.S. is, then, still implicated in the harsh realities of undocumented immigrants, just as it was in the 1980s. These persistent dilemmas have given rise to what is being called the New Sanctuary Movement. The intricate economic conditions in which these injustices faced by undocumented immigrants flourish, however, are difficult to trace and do not place the blame as squarely on the shoulders of the U.S. government as they did in the 1980s. As a result, the modern day Sanctuary Movement must focus its efforts on the correction of more concrete problems. One of the most dehumanizing aspects of the U.S. immigration system is its use of detention centers for undocumented immigrant men, women, and children who await their trials or are being held for other reasons. Susan Terrio, author of “Dispelling the myths: Unaccompanied, undocumented minors in U.S. immigration custody,” draws attention to the contrasts between the detention centers of the 1980s and 90s, when the U.S. was receiving refugees from the Central American civil wars, and those of today. Her work focuses on the children who, after long and dangerous journeys away from peril in their homes and native countries, often find themselves in detention centers after their arrival in the U.S. During the 1980s, Terrio writes, the U.S. government “routinely released detained children to parents or family already living in the U.S., pending immigration court hearings” (Terrio 2015). This is no longer the case. To begin, unaccompanied undocumented minors are sometimes the first of their families to flee to the U.S. They have no family to turn to once they arrive. Secondly, new laws are in place that curtail the possibility of such a transfer from U.S. governmental custody to that of a family. In 1993, Terrio explains, the Supreme Court ruled that it was legal to “detain undocumented children in secure

facilities for unspecified and sometimes prolonged periods of time” before being released to approved sponsors (Terrio 2015). These facilities, which not only legally held children for weeks, months, and even years before making any steps towards relocation, are not held to high legal standards which regards to the care they provide. In 1997, in an effort to speed the release and relocation processes, detention centers were held only to “minimum standards for [detainees’] humane treatment” (Terrio 2015). Terrio conducted various interviews with children who had been held in these centers, and they all had stories to tell of the misfortunes of their circumstances. Most told of excessively cold temperatures and inadequate food, many described the overly cramped living conditions, and some even told of verbal and physical abuse by the center officials. Corporal punishment for poor behavior is common, and the longer a child is kept in a detention center, the poorer his or her behavior is likely to be, inciting a cycle of rebellion and penalty that grows more desperate and harsher with time. Terrio writes that most children are held an average of between sixty and seventy-five days, an especially anxious interval for children who are unsure whether they will be allowed to stay in the U.S. or whether they will be sent back to their home countries (Terrio 2015).

Churches across the U.S. are stepping in to aid these undocumented immigrants. Seeing the government’s response to this influx in desperate migrants, many religious institutions have decided to operate outside of the law. Indeed, this is the heart of what this research paper would deem “undocumented evangelism”: it avoids the limelight shone on other outreach programs, and yet continually flaunts legal conventions in order to answer to a higher call. Especially since the election of President Donald Trump, church and clergy members have taken action. According to *The Guardian*, hundreds of

churches are encouraging fearful undocumented to seek sanctuary within their walls: “The Church World Service estimates 400 churches nationwide are willing to open their doors to people at risk of deportation” (Sherwood 2016). These undocumented immigrants often feel as though they have no place left to turn. In a recent article published by the *New York Times*, the stories of various men and women highlight their anxiety. They worry about their children if they are deported, they worry about their jobs, they worry about going out in public – in short, all the activities they have enjoyed and all the community bonds they have formed have been put in jeopardy by the heightened threat of deportation (Yee 2017). “I don’t want to go to the store, to church – they are looking everywhere, and they know where to find us,” was the cryptic analysis of one undocumented immigrant from El Salvador. “They could be waiting for us anywhere. Any corner, any block” (Yee 2017). It is this feeling of hopelessness that sanctuary churches work to eliminate. Reverend Robin Hynicka, a Methodist leader in Philadelphia, stressed that sanctuary was not just an escape from the inevitable reality of deportation. Hynicka’s church is providing sanctuary to Javier Flores so that he can stay with his family, which is his “first and foremost desire,” not simply eluding arrest (Sherwood 2016). “Immigration knows where he is,” states Hynicka, as is the case for many undocumented immigrants in limbo between identification and arrest; “He’s not hiding, he’s resisting” (Sherwood 2016).

The moral element of political subversion that ties the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s with the New Sanctuary Movement is crucial to understanding the motivation of the churches who take these risks. As has been discussed, the grim reality of detention centers as destinations for large numbers of undocumented immigrants has inspired many

churches to offer an alternative. The irony is this: these churches seem to be doing the “legal” thing. While housing undocumented immigrants violates U.S. law, how just is it, argue churches, to detain these men, women, and children in unfit establishments for unspecified amounts of time awaiting an unknown fate?

In addition to these pressing questions is that of legal representation. According to author Peter L. Markowitz, whose article was published in the *Fordham Law Review*, undocumented immigrants have difficulty finding the legal representation they are entitled to during their removal procedure. This is especially the case for undocumented immigrants held in detention centers. Markowitz writes that over a period of five years, “over 800,000 immigrants faced the prospect of deportation without the assistance of counsel” (Markowitz 2009). He continues by stating that this number is even higher for detained undocumented immigrants, a population which is itself rapidly climbing, overwhelming both the detention centers which hold them and the legal counsel that is able to aid them. Because of this logistic struggle, undocumented immigrants, many of whom speak only Spanish, are thrown into a judicial system that does not inform them of the rights they do have and rushes them through a proceeding in which they are virtually helpless. This is not intended to be a scathing attack of the detention justice system’s inability to provide legal counsel to each undocumented immigrant, but it is meant to expose its flaws and shortcomings. As has been discussed, these centers can be physically and psychologically damaging to its inhabitants, especially the children. Those inside are often held indefinitely and have very low legal chances of securing asylum. Despite the clear logistic difficulties these centers are encountering, author Carolina Rizzo notes another critical detail: the unclear wording of the 2010 Department of Homeland Security

Appropriations Act has created a quota “requiring the daily detention of 34,000 noncitizens” in detention centers, which costs more than 5 million in taxpayer dollars and keeps the system from improving its efficiency or judging each case individually (Rizzo 2014). Rizzo stresses the need for a system-wide makeover to reflect at once the growing number of undocumented immigrants and their comparative harmlessness: as much as 89 percent of those detained are “not dangerous,” meaning they have committed no crime more serious than having illegally crossed the U.S-Mexican border (Rizzo 2014). Each of these arguments against detention centers presents legitimate facts about their efficiency, sustainability, and morality.

Despite these concerns, the New Sanctuary Movement faces stiff opposition for its attempts to offer an alternative to the living conditions in detention centers and the paralyzing fear of undocumented immigrants who are unsure of their personal safety. President Trump has recently begun to make good on his threats to deny funding to cities that have declared their intention to offer sanctuary to undocumented immigrants: in Austin, Texas, reports *Al Jazeera*, conservative Governor Greg Abbot “kept his promise to withhold \$1.5m from Travis County’s law enforcement in an effort to penalize Austin’s ‘sanctuary city’ status” (Newton, 2017). Law enforcement in sanctuary cities, then, finds itself caught between upholding the law and joining with their communities to support undocumented immigrants, often at the behest of their own budgets. The decision to deny ICE officers the information they need to apprehend undocumented immigrants is illegal for law enforcement agents, but it is a choice that many of them are inspired to make

### **Pope Francis and the Catholic Church**



Pope Francis has served as a signpost for Catholics and Christians who feel called to serve the undocumented immigrant population. His early influences flow from a doctrine known as Liberation Theology, which stresses “liberation, economic justice, consciousness raising, and defending the rights of the poor,” according to authors Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda, who wrote “Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States; Introduction: U.S. Latino Religions and Faith-Based Political, Civic, and Social Action.” Although the New Sanctuary Movement had already begun by the time Pope Francis was promoted to the papacy, his passionate and continuous support for the poor and the immigrant resonated, and his position as the highest leader of the Catholic Church has encouraged congregations to boldly offer their parishes as sanctuaries to these populations. Southside Presbyterian Church, alongside Sacred Heart Catholic Church, is another example of the daily efforts of dedicated individuals to uphold the rights of undocumented immigrants. In a personal interview with a staff member at Southside Presbyterian, the church was framed within its history as one of the first participants in the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s. Now, this church works closely with the undocumented immigrant population, advocating for immigration policy change, running legal clinics to inform undocumented immigrants of their rights, and providing a support system for these men and women and their families. The member with whom the interview spoke extensively about one particular undocumented immigrant: Rosa was a mother of two who approached Southside Presbyterian in August of 2016 to ask for sanctuary. Her children were too young to be covered by the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals, or DACA, and her husband was also undocumented. “One of the most basic things that we do is fight for our families,” stated the interviewee,

emphasizing Southside's empathy for a woman fearful of losing her husband and children to deportation or detention centers (personal interview, 2017). The church granted her sanctuary, and the media swarmed. But the church's historical involvement in social issues had created a welcoming community for Rosa and her family, and signs crying "We Stand With Rosa" began to pop up all across Tucson. Because of ICE's policy not to apprehend in "sensitive locations," Rosa was free to stay on church property for fifteen months. She had been initially apprehended for a minor traffic violation that could have torn her family apart, but Southside's intervention in her family's life "surrounded Rosa in love and care" until ICE offered her an extension that allowed her to return to a normal existence. The Southside interviewee explained that an undocumented immigrant's apprehension is often very fickle: it can hinge on the difference between a lenient ICE officer and a strict one. With so much hanging in the balance for these immigrants, churches like Southside offer hope and safety, if only temporarily.

Sister Norma Pimentel and McAllen, Texas' Sacred Heart Catholic Church are another example of leadership during the New Sanctuary Movement. Sister Norma Pimentel's work with undocumented immigrants attracted Pope Francis' attention in 2015, when he recognized, congratulated, and encouraged her efforts to aid a hurting population. A personal interview with Sister Pimentel displays the steady compassion that motivates her in a shaky political climate.

The Sacred Heart Catholic Church is another example of an institution whose daily efforts aid a fearful population. As was described in the opening vignette, Sister Norma Pimentel is one of the nuns who works in this parish to provide for the undocumented immigrants of her Texas community. Sister Norma Pimentel first gained

fame during a broadcast of Pope Francis' virtual visit to the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in McAllen, Texas, in September 2015. After having heard the heart-breaking stories of a number of undocumented immigrants, who had endured the dangers of hunger, thirst, and violence on their journeys north, the Pope called Sister Pimentel by name, asking her to make her way to the front of the church. Her eyes streaming with tears, she acknowledged her own efforts and those of her church to improve the lives of undocumented immigrants.

Sister Pimentel is, because of her recognition by the Pope, a role model for individuals and organizations that seek to provide sanctuary to undocumented immigrants in spite of prohibitory laws. Sister Pimentel works with Catholic Charities, a nationwide religious organization whose arm in McAllen, Texas, seeks to aid recent arrivals to the U.S. The respite center Sister Pimentel oversees began in June of 2014, and has now provided for more than twenty thousand immigrants, according to ABC News. Situated near a border bus station, McAllen receives undocumented immigrants on a daily basis. There is safety in Sacred Heart, at least for a few hours: the immigrants can eat, drink, sleep, shower, and call their families in the parish center before they are processed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. There is even a playground for immigrant children to be children again after their perilous expedition.

Although President Trump's administration has left many undocumented immigrants feeling more unsafe than ever, Sister Pimentel stressed the support that her community has offered to Sacred Heart, which she explained runs completely on donated resources and volunteer efforts. Though McAllen is not a "sanctuary city," it is a city of immigrants, she stated, which understands the struggles of other immigrants. Sister

Pimentel's voice, as well as that of her community, offers a counterpoint to political agendas: "we are here because they are family that needs help" (personal interview, 2017). The daily efforts of genuinely compassionate people like Sister Norma Pimentel have the power to shape the political climate of a whole country.

## **Conclusion**

The political environment surrounding undocumented immigration is as charged and polemic as it was during the Central American civil wars of the 1980s. Churches are again rising to the aid of those undocumented immigrants who feel threatened by the U.S. government's policies and the uncertainty of their position in a country that many millions have made their home for years. Undocumented evangelism, the efforts of churches and cities to make life more secure for those who fear deportation around every corner, contributes to a more inclusive environment that encourages the development of empathetic and informed communities. Although President Donald Trump's rhetoric is often scathing and aggressive, his voice is countered by that of Pope Francis, whose roots in liberation theology stress the kinship of all. Undocumented evangelists offer a glimpse into a more accepting world, and their work acknowledges the integral role that undocumented immigrants play in the U.S., unobtrusively working, living, and seeking the American dream for themselves and their families.

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