

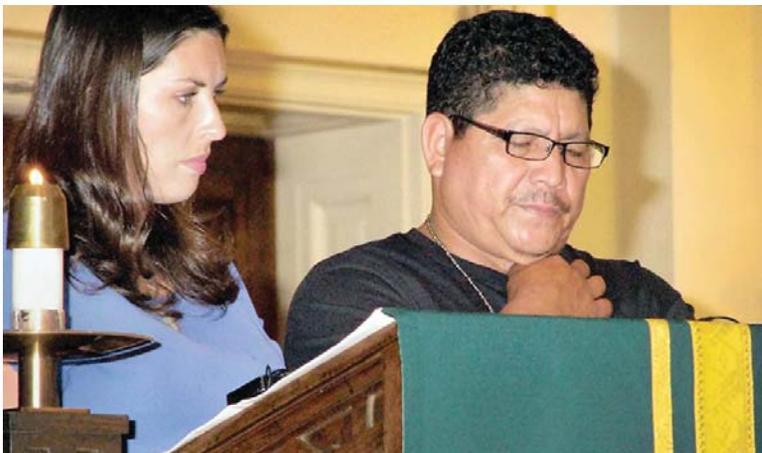


ONE FAMILY UNDER GOD: W

BY SUE WEISHAR, PH.D.



The U.S. Catholic Church has been a strong and prophetic voice in the struggle to reform our nation's broken immigration system. Now that Congress finally appears willing to substantially address the issue, Catholic advocates across the country have doubled down on efforts to pass comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform legislation that includes a path to citizenship for more than 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. On June 5, Archbishop Gregory Aymond led a Spirit-filled prayer service for immigration reform at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans where he prayed that every human being be treated with dignity and respect and for public officials to have the courage and wisdom to reform our current immigration laws. The event was organized by the Archdiocese of New Orleans, Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans, and the Jesuit Social Research Institute. The immigration stories of three of the individuals who addressed the standing-room-only gathering follow.



Pictures from top: Salvador and Maribel Tejada, who first entered the U.S. without authorization in the early 1980's, explained how being able to legalize their status transformed their lives; Archbishop Aymond speaking with members of an immigrant family; Jennifer and Juan Molina after Jennifer's testimony; Edelberto Cruz Carranza became overwhelmed with emotion telling his story. Jacinta Gonzales, Lead Organizer for the Congress of Day Laborers, interpreted for Mr. Carranza. Photos by Christine Bordelon, courtesy of the *Clarion Herald*.

Witnessing for Immigration Reform

Testimony of Edelberto Cruz Carranza

Good evening. My name is Edelberto Cruz Carranza. I came to New Orleans in 2007 to work in the construction industry and help rebuild New Orleans. I am from Nicaragua and am a member of St. Anthony of Padua Church and the Congress of Day Laborers. The Congress fights for the dignity and rights of all workers helping to rebuild New Orleans.

In Jeremiah, as we just read, it says:

*Practice honesty and integrity;
Rescue the victim who has been wronged
From the hands of his oppressor;
Do not exploit the stranger.*

I understand the significance of those words. In August 2011, I was working for a construction company at a site in Kenner. About two dozen of my fellow workers and I had not been paid in two weeks. We went to the office to complain, and instead of the company redressing our wrongs, we were arrested by ICE in a violent and cruel raid. I can tell you that experience was the worst moment of my life. After spending 56 hours in jail, I suffered the humiliation of wearing an ankle bracelet for 90 days as though I were some kind of an animal. Despite ongoing investigations by multiple federal labor and civil rights agencies, ICE has refused to grant me and my fellow workers prosecutorial discretion and close our cases. Some of the victims and witnesses from the raid have already been deported.

God sent his son to redeem the world, yet he was condemned and crucified. I feel that immigrant workers in this city are often condemned and crucified. Please continue to pray that the crucifixion of immigrants through deportation and broken families ends and that the U.S. Congress votes for just and comprehensive immigration reform. Thank you.

Testimony of Jennifer Molina

My name is Jenifer Molina. I am from New Orleans and grew up in Lakeview and Metairie. I met and fell in love with Juan Molina in 1994. Juan is from Honduras, and when we met, he was undocumented. I worried about him being deported every single day we were together. Thank God we got good advice from Catholic Charities, and we moved up the date of our marriage so Juan could legalize under a provision of immigration law that was about to expire. It was not until later that I came to see what a nightmare our life would have been if we had waited.

After Juan was able to legalize, he studied English at Delgado, then got an associate's degree and went on to the University of New Orleans to get a bachelor's degree in accounting. After Katrina, Juan started his own business and is working hard to make it a success. We are the parents of three wonderful boys. Manuel and Miguel are both altar servers at St. Anthony of Padua church.

I know so many people in our community who have so much potential like Juan, but that potential cannot be realized because of their legal status. It breaks my heart when I think of all the mothers I know who live in fear every single day that the father of their children could be deported.

We just heard in Paul's letter to the Corinthians that "if one part of the Body of Christ suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy." We are all suffering because of current immigration laws. I hope and pray that our leaders have the courage and wisdom to vote to reform our immigration system. Then 11 million undocumented immigrants can come out of the shadows and fully realize their God-given potential, and families can stay together.

Testimony of Gabriela*

Hello. My name is Gabriela, and in three days I will be 13 years old. My two sisters and I were born in the United States, but my mom was born in Mexico. We moved to New Orleans about eight years ago, and right away we started to attend Mass at a local Catholic church. I am an altar server there, and sometimes I help out with the English classes after Spanish Mass. I love our church—especially the enthusiasm people have for singing and praying. I attend a Catholic grade school on a scholarship where I am in the choir. I love my school—people are very loving and supportive, and I have a lot of friends there.

I wanted to speak today for all the kids who have parents who are undocumented—like my mom. Sometimes I worry what would happen to my sisters and me if my mom is stopped by the police. We would all be separated and placed in foster care if they sent my mom back to Mexico. She told me she would not take us to Mexico because it would be too dangerous for us there.

My mother came here to work hard and to help my grandmother and grandfather who I have never met, but my mom talks to them every day by telephone. Thank you for seeing that, like we just sang, "we are all God's people." Thank you for praying to change the immigration laws so families like mine can stay together and live in peace.

** Speaker's name was changed to protect her mother's identity.*

For a digital copy of One Family Under God: A Prayer Service for Comprehensive Immigration Reform to use in your diocese, please contact Martin Gutierrez at Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans at mgutierrez@ccano.org or Sue Weishar at sweishar@loyno.edu