



*Immigration:
The flight into America*

Unmasking the death penalty

I WAS PLEASANTLY SURPRISED to open the September issue of *The Witness* and find an article by the Bruderhof and a picture of my sister at a "Free Mumia" rally. Growing up in the Bruderhof communities, I know that they have received lots of outside opposition and many negative responses to their anti-death penalty stance. I'm glad another Christian publication agrees that capital punishment is wrong.

**Melissa Rhoads
Elka Park, NY**

I FOUND the "Alternatives to the death penalty" article by Ruth Morris fascinating, but I have a very basic question to ask: By what method is it determined in these various cultures that the offender is guilty of the offense against the victim? And what if the offender maintains his/her innocence despite conviction, as is happening as I write this in what I believe is "justice gone wrong"?

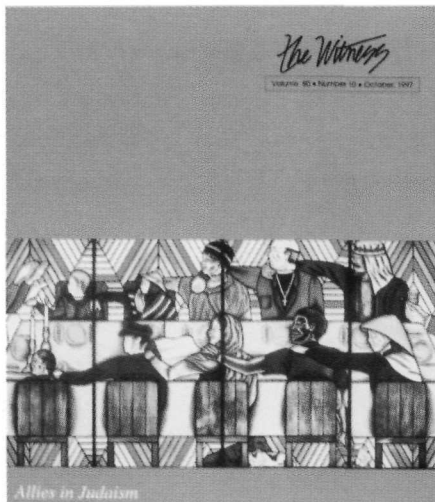
I was especially interested in Genesee County's program. Yet there is no indication that a person was arrested, charged, and his/her guilt determined, since the VORP activities begin "within hours of the crime." Are the police making the guilty determination without benefit of trial to which the alleged perpetrator is entitled under the Constitution?

VORP programs in all the cultures described sound positive and helpful to everyone involved; but there needs to be some explication of the methodology by which the alleged perpetrator is determined to be guilty of the crime against the victim.

**Priscilla Armstrong
Baltimore, MD**

Allies in Judaism

SOME PROBLEMS ARE MORE COMPLEX than they seem. Your October issue mentioned the Baptist goal of converting the



Jews. Two events at the 1996 Southern Baptist Convention provoked this controversy. One was a statement from the podium that by the year 2000 Baptists hoped to take the message of Christ to every American. The second was a resolution dissenting from that of a rival Baptist group. It said that all persons, Jews included, should be offered the message of Christ. The practical result was to designate a liaison to work with Jews for Jesus.

Few people bothered to read the resolution itself, including apparently those who wrote op ed pieces and put paid advertisements in the *New York Times*. The resolution noted that there had been "an organized effort on the part of some" to deny that Christians had an obligation or even a right to "proclaim the gospel" to Jews. Affirming that Christians are "indebted" to the Jewish people and that the Jews are "beloved" of God, the resolution nevertheless noted that Christians were told to take the message of salvation to "every kindred tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). The SBC, having "neglected the Jewish people" in the past, would now "direct energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people."

As a non-Baptist, I was not pleased to see this resolution, but as someone who teaches a class on Religion and Politics and who tries to understand the authentic perspective of each group about whom I teach, I was exceptionally concerned at the inflammatory way it was distorted. Editors denounced it as anti-Semitic and said it reflected the type of thinking that

led to the Holocaust. One newspaper editorially asked, "What is the difference between a Baptist and a Nazi? It's a matter of degree."

There is exceptional hostility to conservative Christians in our country, a hostility that borders on something shameful. *The Witness* is not one of the great offenders, nor did your issue seriously distort what the SBC said. As evangelicals, they WOULD like to take the message of Christ to every American and they WOULD hope that everyone would accept. They DO take at face value the statement of Jesus that "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6) and they DO believe that there is a "new" covenant that moved beyond the old.

The question remains for those of us not in the theologically conservative camp, how do we relate to those Christians who are? I do not have the answer, but I do know that it does not lie in calling them Nazis and anti-Semites and bigots.

I read your journal faithfully and consider it a wonderful provocation. Keep up the good work.

**Ron Stockton
Dearborn, MI**

Dorothy Granada

I THOUGHT YOU AND YOUR READERS should know that my associate and good friend Dorothy Granada has been awarded the 1997 International Pfeffer Peace Prize for her lifelong commitment to nonviolent social change. Each year since 1989, the Fellowship of Reconciliation has presented this award to an individual or organization working internationally to achieve social change through nonviolence.

Dorothy Granada, an American of Chicana and Filipina descent, has since 1989 worked in the small community of Mulukuku, Nicaragua, providing trainings in nonviolence, gender sensitivity, and human rights. She also opened a women's health clinic, which not only provides needed health services but empowers women to identify and organize against forces that have marginalized them.

**Grant M. Gallup
Casa Ave Maria
Managua, Nicaragua**

Letters

Grieving

I THINK YOU WILL BE INTERESTED in knowing how valuable *The Witness* of a few months ago, covering bereavement, has been at Fairhaven.

Last January I was elected to the Board of Directors of the Residents' Association, specifically to become chair of the Religious Life Committee, with general involvement in the religious activities of the Fairhaven Community. Fairhaven is a function of the Diocese of Maryland, and we are about 46 percent Episcopalian, with many other denominations represented, and one or two residents who say "None." We have a very nice chapel with Eucharist every Sunday and some other services. There is an Ecumenical Service every Sunday in the auditorium, with communion every quarter. There are three or four joint services each year. The chaplain, The Rev. Sarah Lewis, and assistant chaplain, The Rev. Fielder Israel, alternate between the chapel Eucharist and the Ecumenical Service. Also there is a Presbyterian afternoon service once a month in the chapel. This service is handled by the minister and organist of a neighboring Presbyterian church.

A Roman Catholic priest from St. Joseph's parish comes periodically for Mass in the Health Center Chapel. A Rabbi from a Conservative Synagogue comes about once a month.

Four Bible Study groups meet weekly, and there are occasional speakers, videos and other presentations. There is much going on.

I have members of many denominations on my Religious Life Committee. When I asked a friend if she would serve as a representative of the Unitarian-Universalist group, she agreed, provided she could bring up the question of a widow/widower support group. As you can imagine, of the 420-plus residents here there are many in that category. My friend has been widowed twice, and has been in support groups, so she knows whereof she speaks. The committee told her to pursue the matter, and the chaplain, who is staff to the committee, agreed to talk to the Directors of Social Services and Resident Services.

The results are not encouraging. Sarah, the chaplain, found that before she came such a group had been proposed and "there seemed

to be no interest." My Unitarian friend found that there are no books on death, dying, bereavement or grieving in the Fairhaven library (a very good library), and the library committee wanted none. Sarah is starting such a library in her office. We have ceased trying to understand this attitude.

Against that background I read *The Witness*, catching up on periodicals I had put aside. I then gave it to my friend, who was delighted to read it and has been circulating it. I think the last figure she gave me was 16 persons on her list, not only residents, but at least one staff person. It has been very helpful.

Whether as a result of this agitation or a new Director of Social Services we don't know, but there is a current announcement of a bereavement support group to meet shortly. Some of us are a little suspicious that it sounds like a social worker telling people, rather than individuals supporting each other, but we will have to wait and see.

Oliver C. (Cal) Reedy
Sykesville, MD

Defying presumptions

THANK YOU FOR THE WELL-TIMED, free sample of *The Witness* (June 1997) on *Defying presumptions: gay and lesbian Christians celebrate Jesus' call*, which arrived on my desk at Germantown Mennonite Church this week. I say "well-timed" since it is two weeks ago today that our congregation was dismembered from the Mennonite Church via the action of our district body, the Franconia Mennonite Conference, because of our welcoming of gay men and lesbians as members of our congregation. It is a true sign of hope to find many throughout the wider church who have given "witness" for many years — in your case 80 years!

Richard J. Lichty
Philadelphia, PA

Witness praise

JUST LOGGED ON YOUR WEB PAGE. I'm a loyal reader and it's nice to think I can enjoy your ideas between issues. You do good work!

Betsy Willis
Zionville, NC

Classifieds

Youth ministry director

An urban youth ministry seeks part-time director. The Mission of the Holy Spirit, an outreach program of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia that works with teens in the city of Norfolk, seeks a leader to work with program development, coordination and community involvement. The vision of the Mission is to empower inner city youth through various programs, spiritual development and Christian community. We seek a grounded Christian, an organizer, strong in youth ministry, committed to community involvement, and able to work with our volunteers. Open for lay or clergy, equal opportunity employer. Contact: The Rev. Susan S. Keller, Mission of the Holy Spirit, 600 Talbot Hall Road, Norfolk, VA 23505 (757-423-8287).

Episcopal Urban Intern Program

Work in social service, live in Christian community in Los Angeles. For adults 21-30. Apply now for the 1998-99 year. Contact: The Rev. Gary Commins, 260 N. Locust St., Inglewood, CA 90301. 310-674-7700.

Vocations

Contemplating religious life? Members of the Brotherhood and the Companion Sisterhood of Saint Gregory are Episcopalians, clergy and lay, married and single. To explore a contemporary Rule of Life, contact: The Director of Vocations, Brotherhood of St. Gregory, Dept. W, Saint Bartholomew's Church, 82 Prospect Street, White Plains, NY 10606-3499.

Classifieds

Witness classifieds cost 75 cents a word or \$30 an inch, whichever is less. Payments must accompany submissions. Deadline is the 15th of the month, two months prior to publication.

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Immigrants become citizens at a Mass swearing-in ceremony held by the INS at the Jacob Javits Center on July 25, 1996 in New York City. The young boy, watching his mother, is already a citizen. Photo by Andrew Lichtenstein/Impact Visuals.

Cover: Flight into Egypt by Bartolome Esteban Murillo, © Detroit Institute of Arts

The Witness offers a fresh and sometimes irreverent view of our world, illuminated by faith, Scripture and experience. Since 1917, *The Witness* has been advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those people who have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." We push boundaries, err on the side of inclusion and enjoy bringing our views into tension with orthodox Christianity. *The Witness'* roots are Episcopalian, but our readership is ecumenical. For simplicity, we place news specific to Episcopalians in our Vital Signs section. *The Witness* is committed to brevity for the sake of readers who find little time to read, but can enjoy an idea, a poem or a piece.

Manuscripts: We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish.

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Seeking a vision, not a dream

by Julie A. Wortman

The deportations have begun — and the conundrums. People here in Maine are scratching their heads over a mother who is an “undocumented” refugee from Central America. She came here to live the “American dream,” a hope superficially so like Isaiah’s vision of “A new heavens and a new earth” (Is. 65:17), in which the people enjoy the fruits of their own labor and common well-being prevails, that many have come to think it sacred. Under the new immigration law passed in 1996 [see p. 8], this woman faces deportation. But her baby, born here, is a U.S. citizen and cannot be expelled. Should the child and mother be separated?

Meanwhile, a wealthy capitalist who owns most of a nearby coastal island has given up his U.S. citizenship and emigrated to a Caribbean nation. In addition to this home in Maine and his Caribbean home base, he owns residences in Colorado and Ireland. Like so many seeking to immigrate to this country, this man, too, seeks refuge — from U.S. taxes.

Tax money, of course, is what many anti-immigration, pro-capitalist Americans fear is in too short supply to provide for the neediest among us, not to mention for “foreigners” of limited means. The American dream and Isaiah’s vision abruptly part ways when it comes to making money, not creation, the bottom line.

Still, U.S. commercial advertising and government propaganda downplay this truth so successfully that people are employing desperate strategies to reach these shores. The poorest and most unskilled

soon find themselves exploited by owners of meat packing plants, garment industry sweatshops and non-union janitorial services who take advantage of their willingness to do just about anything for the lowest of wages in order to elude persecution or gain what they hope will be a foothold on the American ladder of upward mobility [see p. 13].

Undocumented persons are especially vulnerable to workplace and housing abuses. The new law, with its requirement that people illegally living here who now wish to legalize their status must return to their homelands for a lengthy period first, has forced many more deeply underground — and more securely into the hands of the unscrupulous.

Between our burgeoning prison population — more and more of whom are providing cheap labor for American companies — and those hiding from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, we have created a new, expendable, underclass of virtual slaves.

This holiday season American religious and humanitarian groups have organized a boycott of gifts produced by overseas sweatshops [see p. 17], but the abuse of invisible legions of mistreated workers in our own midst is harder to fight. The good news is that the courage to risk exposing and facing up to this exploitation by “native-born” entrepreneurs is beginning to come from the workers themselves, making solidarity more possible.

But immigration is more than a justice issue. We cannot ignore that the demographics of this country are inexorably changing. As Richard Rodriguez points out [see p. 18], many of the emerging

racial tensions we see in this country no longer have anything to do with “white” people. And while greed and racial/ethnic/class prejudice seem the most obvious reasons for this country’s current xenophobic immigration laws, most of us have internalized so completely the competitive, scarcity model we learned as children in games of musical chairs that any new person is a threat [see p. 6].

There’s another possibility. In the recent film, *La Promesse* [see p. 27], an adolescent boy believes himself responsible for the welfare of an immigrant mother and child. He is fascinated by this woman’s steadfast belief in her own dignity and in her commitment to justice. Through her self possession and spiritual depth, he discovers his own.

If we’d be open to the gift, I wonder if it might not be so for us? Thinking of Matthew’s account of the holy family’s flight into Egypt, there is reason to hope that our churches might teach such a possibility. But the call to “respect the dignity of every human being” has nowhere been more steadfastly ignored — however eagerly celebrated — than in our churches [see p. 28]. This is true despite concrete efforts to provide sanctuary, legal aid, resettlement assistance and advocacy.

And that’s the challenge.

If people of faith can come to grips with the disturbing resistance to the respectful widening of the circle in our own churches, I think we’d be on the path to replacing a false dream with a divine vision — one that offers a new heavens and a new earth for us all. **TW**

editor's note

Julie A. Wortman is co-editor/publisher of *The Witness*.

Memories of tables and chairs

by Janet Shea

My mother, a woman who thrived in her place at the center of the family, is 90 years old. Once gregarious, she is now sorrowful, she is no longer in the middle of things. At one time in my life she was my friend, my best friend, we told each other. Later on she became my companion. Now I am hers. It used to be that she bought my clothes, even after I had grown out of childhood, even after I had children of my own. It used to be that she treated me to lunch, for the sheer pleasure of my company. She is confused now, she still looks for money in her empty purse, money so she may continue to surprise me with presents. Sometimes I slip her a bill or two as we pretend that she has not lost her place in the benevolent center. Over the years I have watched this escalating tug-of-war, her desperate hold on to something long since past. More reluctant to be a grandmother to my children than a mother to me. The mother of a mother. I have watched her resistance, her inability to find a new place, her waning energy wasted in the struggle, her unwillingness to step aside, to move over, to welcome the unknown. I so mourn for her lack of peace in the process of her own displacement.

Displacement? Replacement? Placement? Place? When I think of “place” the image that comes to my mind is one of tables and chairs. Dinner tables, supper tables, harvest tables, Thanksgiving tables. A home. My childhood home, in an Irish-American enclave south of Boston, where there was no table too small, where there was always room for the un-

invited, for the weary traveller. Piano benches, seating three. Footstools piled with telephone books, high as a chair. An ironing board dragged out from its hutch, set up with a sheet, mis-matched plates, and a candle. This is the ideal in my memory. A remembrance of the Eucharistic table. A family moves over, welcomes the stranger, makes room at the table.

*There was only one winner,
and one could only win by
beating out the others. An
odd juxtaposition of plenty to
scarcity, generosity to greed,
position to displacement.*

In the same house, of the same childhood, there were birthday parties, parties at which the game called “Musical Chairs” was part of the celebration. It was a game filled with much excitement, a bit of a rough-house game where seven or eight children ran around a circle of chairs to the accompaniment of a the piano-player pounding out a lively tune, then stopping at whim — the signal for each child to take his/her place. The catch to the game was that there was always one chair less than the number of children, and at each go-round one chair was removed, one place diminished in the tussle. Not only did a child lose his/her seat in the game, but the loss of that seat meant that the child was eliminated from the game. There was only one winner, and one could only win by beating out the others. The power of the game insidious, impo-

tent without the participation of every child at the party. Puzzling, disturbing images. An odd juxtaposition of plenty to scarcity, generosity to greed, position to displacement.

The fear of displacement, a residual resistance in welcoming the stranger, is deeply imbedded in our cultural psyche. Do we not as a country call out to the poor, the hungry, to those people yearning to be free — and at the same time pull out the chairs beneath them? Do we not through the global media seduce the poor with our riches, then cry poor ourselves?

At the same time, fear of displacement, a residual resistance to the newcomer, mistrust of the stranger are deeply imbedded in our individual psyches. How familiar is the experience of being in a circle — a neighborhood organization, a book club, a prayer group, a writing workshop — and lo, a new participant is introduced to the group. Is there not often a niggling kind of resistance that barely comes to the surface of sophisticated and enlightened discourse? When I find myself in similar situations a quiet voice inside reminds me that I am being asked to make room, to move over, to give up my place. Not always do I welcome that newcomer without a silent fear, a secret jealousy that the new person will be valued more than I. Loved more than I. That in some way that stranger will dethrone me from my place of long-standing.

It is difficult for me to imagine what the proper Bostonians in the late 19th century feared of my Irish ancestors, immigrants seeking relief from the famine, as they “landed in droves,” half starved/half dead. Looking for work, a new life in America, they were not welcomed. Greeted instead with the all-too-familiar sign on the doors of the shops and factories, “NO IRISH NEED APPLY.” I still wonder what those privileged, well-educated Bostonians thought they would lose.

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Janet Shea is a writer who lives in Boston, Mass. and Martinsville, Maine.

Exiles

by Juan Felipe Herrera

... and I heard an unending scream piercing nature.

— from the diary of Edvard Munch/1892

At the greyhound bus stations, at airports, at silent wharfs
the bodies exit the crafts. Women, men, children; cast out
from the new paradise.

They are not there in the homeland, in Argentina, not there
in Santiago, Chile; never there no more in Montevideo, Uruguay
and they are not here

in America

The are in exile; a slow scream across a yellow bridge
the jaws stretched, widening, the eyes multiplied into blood
orbits, torn, whirling, spilling between two slopes: the sea black,
swallowing all prayers, shadeless. Only tall faceless figures
of pain flutter across the bridge. They pace in charred suits,
the hands lift, point and ache and fly at sunset as cold dark
birds. They will hover over the dead ones: a family shattered
by military, buried by hunger, asleep now with the eyes burning
echoes calling Joaquin, Maria, Andrea, Joaquin, Joaquin, Andrea,

en exilio

From here we see them, we the ones from here, not there or across.
only here, without the bridge, without the arms as blue liquid
quenching the secret thirst of unmarked graves without
our flesh journeying refuge or pilgrimage; not passengers
on imaginary ships sailing between reef and sky, we that die
here awake on Harrison Street, on Excelsior Avenue clutching
the tenderness of chrome radios, whispering to the saints
in supermarkets, motionless in the chasms of playgrounds.
searching at 9 a.m. from our third floor cells, bowing mute,
shoving the curtains with trembling speckled brown hands. Alone,
we look out to the wires, the summer, to the newspapers wound
in knots as matches for tenements. We look out from
our miniature vestibules, peering out from our old clothes.
the father's well sewn plaid shirt pocket, an old woman's
oversized wool sweater peering out from the make-shift kitchen.
We peer out to the streets, to the parades, we the ones from here
not there or across, from here, only here. Where is our exile?
Who has taken it?

Exiles of Desire, Houston, Arte Publico Press, 1985

Poetry

The flight into America

by Camille Colatosti

After seeing his entire family massacred, a young Rwandan man asked his priest for help. The cleric sent him to a church in Kenya, where another priest gave him the address of Freedom House in Detroit, a 14-year-old shelter for refugees and asylum seekers.

Another Rwandan, this time a woman, had a comparable experience. She escaped assassins by hiding under a pile of dead bodies for a week. The bodies were her husband, siblings and parents. The killers who murdered her family thought that she was dead as well.

When they finally left, she didn't give them a chance to finish her off. Instead, she, too, managed to find her way to Freedom House.

From Albania, a rock musician made a similar journey. His lyrics and music violated his country's laws. With a false visa in hand, he came to the U.S. His Detroit taxi driver told him about Freedom House.

"A lot of people who come to us have to flee in the middle of the night because if they stayed they would be killed," explains Freedom House Executive Director Lynn Partington. "We had about 500 people come to us so far this year. They came from 67 different countries, seeking asylum. Whenever there is a crisis abroad, we see people from those countries a few months later. We have a lot of people from Rwanda, Iraq, Syria, Central America, Bulgaria, Ethiopia, and Somalia."

Who is seeking entry?

In the diversity of those who approach its

Camille Colatosti teaches English at the Detroit College of Business.

threshold, Freedom House is a microcosm of the U.S. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), 911,000 legal immigrants entered the U.S. in 1996. 198,000 received refugee status. 595,000 were admitted under family reunification guidelines, and 118,000 for their job skills. The INS estimates that an estimated 250,000 additional people entered the country without proper documentation.

"This law takes away our hope we had, coming to this country. It takes away our hope of becoming someone in this life."

— Carmen Martinez

About 37 percent of 1996's legal immigrants came from Asia. This includes immigrants from Vietnam, China, Pakistan and India. Slightly less than one-third — 32 percent — came from the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico. Mexico is the single largest home nation for U.S. immigrants: 163,572 legal immigrants — and about 50,000 undocumented immigrants — came to the U.S. from Mexico last year. About 18 percent of legal U.S. immigrants came from Europe. The rest came from a variety of nations.

But a new 1996 law, called the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, is aimed at limiting immigration into the U.S. Focusing on immigrants who have gained entry illegally, it is also targeted on keeping refugees out of the U.S. altogether by allowing for

what is called "expedited removal." This means that immigration inspectors at ports of entry are no longer required to hold case hearings before denying entry to immigrants who fail to show proper documentation. According to Lisa Brodyaga, an attorney for Refugio del Rio Grande, a refugee shelter founded 10 years ago in Harlingen, Tex., "If the person who is conducting the interview — the lowest level person in the Immigration Service — thinks you are not eligible, he can turn you back."

Jessica LaBumbard, the legal coordinator with Detroit's Freedom House, expresses dismay over this new development. "It's difficult for me to get access to people because they are being deported so quickly now. Some people have no opportunity to tell their stories. They have no opportunity to gain asylum."

Freedom House greets the immigrants who seek aid much differently than the U.S. government now does. Freedom House opens its doors to anyone who has a well-founded fear of persecution in his/her home country, based on religion, ethnicity or membership in a social or political group. Freedom House takes seriously the Geneva Convention's Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

In light of the 1996 immigration law, many refugees and immigrant advocates wonder if the U.S. still adheres to this principle. "Protecting political refugees," says Partington, "is what our country was founded on." Yet, new U.S. immigration laws and procedures are rocking that foundation, making it hard for refugees to find asylum in America. It is so difficult, in fact, that Detroit's Freedom House, located just a few blocks south of the Ambassador Bridge connecting Detroit to Windsor, Ontario, sees more and more of its refugees decide to seek asylum in

Canada.

"There," says Partington, "refugees have a 50 percent chance of acceptance. Here, they have only an 18 percent chance."

Brodyaga agrees. "When I started in this work 20 years ago," she says, "if the application was not frivolous, an asylum-seeker could obtain a work permit virtually immediately. Now, there is little political asylum left."

Past anti-immigrant policies

Despite its reputation as a nation of immigrants, the U.S. has a history of enacting laws that exclude immigrants from its shores. The first exclusion act — the Chinese Exclusion act of May 6, 1881 — barred Chinese immigrants from naturalization. This act was not repealed until 1943. Before that, in 1921, Congress established a system of immigration laws that were based on quotas and national origins. The Nationality Act of 1952 attempted to regularize these quotas, yet it was still discriminatory. It was not until 1965 that Congress abolished the national origins quota system, instituting the standards for legal immigration that remain today.

There are three ways to legally immigrate to the U.S. The first is to reunite U.S. citizens and permanent residents with close family members — parents, children, spouses and siblings. The second is to have an employer sponsor an individual who brings a needed skill to the U.S. And the third way to immigrate legally is to be a political refugee.

This standard was amended on November 6, 1986, with the Immigration Reform and Control Act. This authorized amnesty for undocumented immigrants who had lived in the U.S. since January 1, 1982. Congress also, for the first time in U.S. history, created sanctions prohibiting employers from knowingly hiring, recruiting or referring for a fee, people not authorized to work in the U.S.

A new 'reform' and 'responsibility' act

The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 has now changed the immigration standard again, restricting access to immigration by altering the way in which deportation proceedings are conducted. It also took away many forms of amnesty or relief from deportation, and it created new requirements for people who want to immigrate or become legal in the U.S.



Portraits of immigrants exhibited in Ellis Island, N.Y., 1997

Maria Dumladi/Impact Visuals

Many of these requirements, say immigrant advocates, are so cumbersome as to be impossible to follow. Rather than keep immigrants out, the new law may, advocates fear, simply leave more immigrants undocumented than ever before. Unable to wade through contradictory rules, or to wait years for applications to be processed, people will remain in the U.S. in an undocumented state.

The 1996 law, for instance, makes it economically infeasible for immigrants to bring family members to the U.S. The law now requires sponsoring citizens or permanent residents to prove that immigrating family members can be supported at 125 percent of the federal poverty

level. As Brodyaga explains, "A family of six — four children and two parents — needs an annual income of \$26,050. In Texas, your teachers, police, even immigration personnel don't earn that."

Carmen Martinez, a 44-year-old farm worker who migrated from Mexico in 1986, is a good example. The new law makes it nearly impossible for her to gain legal immigrant status for four of her eight children. The law requires her to make \$30,000 a year and she makes

\$10,000. "No one could ever earn \$30,000 picking strawberries, said Martinez.

"This law takes away our hope we had, coming to this country. It takes away our hope of becoming someone in this life."

The 1996 law also institutes new penalties against immigrants who live in the U.S. in an undocumented state for 180 days. Before they can receive a visa, they must be barred from the country for three years. Those living undocumented in the U.S. for one year or longer must be barred for 10 years. Before the enactment of the 1996 law, a provision known as 245(i) allowed people who were unlawfully in the U.S. but eligible for a visa — people who had married a citizen or a permanent

resident, for example — to apply for an adjustment of status without leaving the country. They did, however, have to pay a \$1,000 fine. These fines recognized reality. Many undocumented family members of permanent residents live in the U.S. while waiting for their applications to be processed. The fees also provide substantial income to the INS — more than \$200 million in 1996.

Yet, this provision is, as of this writing, scheduled to be eliminated. If it is, people who are unlawfully in the U.S. will be required to leave the country and apply for an adjustment of status at the U.S. consulate in their home nation. Once their application is approved, they will have to remain outside the U.S. for three or ten years.

The new law eliminates another exemption for undocumented immigrants who have lived and worked in the U.S. for seven years. Before, they could apply for what was called a “suspension of deportation” by proving that leaving the U.S. would cause extreme hardship. Now the cutoff is 10 years and the procedure, renamed “cancellation of removal,” requires a higher standard: An individual must prove “exceptional and extremely unusual hardship.”

“If you put all of these requirements together,” says Refugio’s Brodyaga, “you can see that non-legal family members of poor people cannot become legal. They will never meet the 125 percent poverty guidelines. They will never get the waivers required. Most people will decide not

*Rice University economist
Donald Huddle claims that,
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Yet, an Urban Institute study
shows that, each year,
immigrants contribute \$25
to \$30 billion more in taxes
than they receive in services.*

to apply for a visa if they have to leave the country to apply and then stay away for three to ten years.”

Confusing immigration debate
Many politicians claim that the Illegal

Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 addresses real concerns of native-born Americans. They point to national anti-immigration groups like the Federation for American Immigration Reform who focus on potential problems with both legal and illegal immigration, such as the potential for dramatic, unsustainable population growth, ethnic tension and an “unassimilated” citizenry. However, most public discussion of immigration reveals contradictory information and confusion. For instance, the restrictionist Federation for American Immigration reform cites Rice University economist Donald Huddle, who claims that, annually, immigrants cost \$51 billion more in social welfare and job displacement costs than they pay in taxes. Yet, an Urban Institute study shows that, each year, immigrants contribute \$25 to \$30 billion more in taxes than they receive in services.

Likewise, some immigrant advocates like Judy Marks, the communications coordinator for the National Immigration Forum, the country’s leading pro-immigration organization whose 300 members include local, state and national pro-immigration organizations, believe that anti-immigrant feelings are grossly exaggerated.

Immigration internationally

Government response to immigration in other countries parallels that of the U.S. Throughout Europe, New Zealand and Australia, governments are increasing restraints on immigrants. In New Zealand, for example, where 60 percent of recent immigrants arrive from Asia, the center-left New Zealand First party is proposing to limit immigration to one-fifth its current level.

In Denmark, Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen recently appointed an opponent of immigration as his new

interior minister. The new minister, Thorkild Simonsen, calls for fewer immigrants to be admitted under family reunification rules and demands that the federal government give additional money and authority to city councils in communities with high immigrant populations.

France is also experiencing its share of controversy over immigration. There, undocumented African immigrants are protesting the reluctance of the French government to recognize their rights and grant them residency status.

In fact, Canada seems to be one of the few nations that is not reducing its immigration goals. Citizen and Immigration Minister Lucienne Robillard said recently that Canada would aim to admit 200,000 to 225,000 immigrants and refugees in 1998 — 5,000 more than its 1997 goals. “Our immigration plan is based on the humanitarian values of welcoming and caring that characterize us,” said Robillard.

“It also reflects our desire to make the most of the undeniable economic and cultural benefits that newcomers bring to this country.” — C.C.

gerated. She points to an October 13 poll in *USA Today*, showing that Americans are now more pro-immigration than they have been in the past. The poll found that those saying they were “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about immigration and its effects have declined since 1992. Then, 52.5 percent of those surveyed believed that there were too many immigrants coming to the U.S. In the recent poll, only 35.25 percent of those surveyed felt this way.

While anti-immigrant voter sentiment may motivate some aspects of current U.S. immigration policy, U.S. business—especially in border states like California

and Texas—applies a stronger, conflicting pressure, because many industries demand the availability of a large pool of vulnerable, undocumented, and docile workers. Pro-immigrant advocates charge that U.S. politicians have responded to these contradictions by enacting laws which appear harsh but which are too complex to be effective. As a result, the workers necessary to key portions of the U.S. service sector remain in this country.

As Philip Marin of the University of California at Davis explained at an April conference held by the Center for International and European Law on Immigration and Asylum, “The most recently arrived legal and illegal Mexican mi-

grants can find jobs in high turnover farming, manufacturing and service areas in agriculture, domestic service and meatpacking.” These jobs, which seem incredibly unattractive to most people born in the U.S., are accepted by many immigrants who see them as a way to

this country who will live in someone else’s house, get one day off a week and have a major part of their salary be room and board. The going wage for a maid in Texas is \$50 a week. What native-born woman would do it?”

Marin defines the relationship between the U.S. and Mexico as a demand-pull supply-push one. “In absolute terms, the U.S. is the world’s major country of immigration and Mexico is the world’s major country of emigration.” Between 1991 and 1995, there were 1.5 million legal Mexican immigrants to the U.S. and an estimated 500,000 undocumented immigrants. While the U.S. supplies jobs that pull Mexican workers across the border, Mexico eliminates employment, pushing its citizens away.

At the beginning of the 1990s, farm labor

occupied 25 percent of the Mexican labor force. Yet, the Mexican government has reduced and plans to further reduce this to 12-15 percent of the labor force by 2015. Marin elaborates, “Policies aimed at economic modernization such as the privatization of government-owned industries and the restructuring of rural Mexico have created mass unemployment. Mexico eliminated most input subsidies and price guarantees in agriculture, switched to direct payment to farmers, eased trade restrictions, signalling the eventual shrinking of the production of many commodities, notably corn, that today absorb a great deal of labor.”

As people lose their jobs in Mexico, they see the employment possibilities just



Border patrol officer checks papers of a Mexican national underneath an Albuquerque, N.M. bridge. His papers were in order; however, the man in the background was taken into custody—he was an illegal alien.

Jeffrey D. Scott/Impact Visuals

enter a new country and start a new life.

Exploitation of undocumented workers

Refugio’s Lisa Brodyaga points to the exploitation that undocumented workers face. “There is a lot of controversy, particularly in the area of agriculture. The work is just horrendously difficult. It is seasonal so you can’t count on a job year round. The working conditions are dangerous to health. People have to deal with pesticides. Frequently, there is no place to go to the toilet. It is not the kind of work that people born in this country will do. It is mostly done by undocumented workers.

“The same is true with people’s maids. It’s very difficult to find women born in

across the border. "There are a lot of positions," says Brodyaga. "The sweatshops along the border have been staffed by undocumented workers for many, many years. It's cheap. There is a market out there. Owners get rich this way."

Legislating vulnerability

Judy Marks of the National Immigration Forum agrees that the new law will not keep undocumented workers from U.S. borders. Instead, it will keep them vulnerable once they get here. "What the Congress didn't tackle," she says, "is targeting employers who knowingly hire undocumented immigrants and exploit them. It is no mystery where undocumented immigrants work. It is no mystery who the employers are. It is not farfetched that we could look at industries who use undocumented workers — garment, hotel and restaurant and agriculture. We could put in place a targeted approach of seeking out employers and heaping enormous fines. This would solve the problem. Instead, we have stripped legal rights of undocumented and documented immigrants."

In fact, the nine-member U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, headed by the late Barbara Jordan and put in place by President Clinton to evaluate U.S. immigration policy, recommended two measures that would have helped curb the exploitation of undocumented workers. These included a national registry of names and social security numbers of all persons authorized to work in the U.S. This registry would ensure that employers could not hire

undocumented workers claiming that they received false information about employees' status. Congress rejected this and introduced a limited, optional pilot telephone verification program that enables employers who want to verify the status of newly hired workers to do so.

The Commission also recommended setting higher penalties for companies that repeatedly violate employer sanctions laws and adding federal labor inspectors to ensure that U.S. employers pay minimum wages. Yet, Congress deleted a provision adding 350 labor inspectors from a draft law.

To Brodyaga, Congress' decisions reveal a deliberate effort "to maintain a large group of undocumented people who have strong ties to the U.S. and who live in the shadows. They will never be eligible for food stamps. They can't complain to OSHA [the agency responsible for administering the Occupational Safety

and Health Act] or the wage and hour board. You have to ask yourself whether the people in Congress can be so naive as to truly believe that a person who doesn't earn enough income, for example, who has four kids, is going to have his or her spouse and children stay out of the U.S. forever? Do they really believe that a person who has grown up here will leave the U.S. and wait 10 years to come back? Do they really believe that these new tremendously harsh laws will result in their stated goals — keeping people out who have been here illegally? Given all the controversy and debate, I don't think they can believe it. It is like Alice in Wonderland."

Brodyaga's strong words contain a warning: "This is totally foreseeable, totally logical. The U.S. is creating an almost slave labor force — people who are undocumented, who are living here, and who can never claim their rights." **TV**

BACK ISSUES WITH CONNECTIONS TO THIS MONTH'S TOPIC

The following back issues of The Witness contain articles which may relate directly to Immigration or simply to the spirit of this month's topic.

- Jubilee economics (1/97)
- Caesar, widows and orphans (4/93)
- Economic justice (5/94)
- Hospitals: quality, access and spirit (6/96)
- Family reunions/family history (7/96)
- The communion of saints (11/93)

Other available back issues:

- Africa: Come, spirit, come (6/95)
- Allies in Judaism (10/97)
- Alternative ways of doing church (9/94)
- Birthing in the face of the dragon (12/91)
- Body wisdom (5/95)
- The Christian Right (10/96)
- Church structures and leadership (5/97)
- Death penalty (9/97)
- Defying presumptions: gay/lesbian Christians (6/97)
- Dialogue (4/94)
- Disabilities (6/94)
- Economies of sin (3/95)

- Fasting in Babylon (12/96)
- Glamour (11/94)
- Godly sex (5/93)
- Grieving rituals (3/97)
- Holy matrimony (12/95)
- In defense of creation (6/93)
- International youth in crisis (7-8/93)
- The Left (3/94)
- In need of a labor movement (9/96)
- Is it ever okay to lie? (4/96)
- The New Party (11/95)
- Northern Ireland: winds of peace (11/97)
- Ordination: multi-cultural priesthood (5/92)
- Raising kids with conscience (3/97)
- Resurrecting land (4/95)
- When the church engages rage (12/92)
- Witness in the world (Gen. Convention issue, 7-8/97)
- Women's spirituality (7/94)

To order a back issue, send a check for \$3.00 per issue ordered to The Witness, 7000 Michigan Ave., Detroit, MI 48210-2872. To charge your back issue to Visa or Mastercard, call 313-841-1967, or fax 313-841-1956.

Facing up to exploitation

by Jane Slaughter

At a rally last summer in Wenatchee, Wash., apple warehouse worker Roberto Guerrero told the story of how he came from Mexico to the U.S. He traveled, he told the crowd, with several other Mexicans stacked between sheets of plywood in the back of a truck. He and his undocumented associates joked to each other, said Guerrero, that if they died on the way, at least they were already in their coffins.

Now a citizen, Guerrero is trying to convince his employer, Stemilt, Inc., to recognize the union that a majority of his fellow workers say they need. They want a living wage and a way to protest unsafe conditions.

"I feel so sad how they treat my people," says Guerrero, speaking of his co-workers. They come, like him, from Mexico, or from El Salvador, Guatemala or Cambodia. They sort, store, and pack a billion dollars worth of apples each year. Roberto himself works in the "seg room," where it's always 30-35 degrees, segregating different sizes and qualities of apples and pears, stacking heavy boxes of fruit.

"It's like the Indians a long time ago," he says. "They [the employers] give little things, and my people give them the gold."

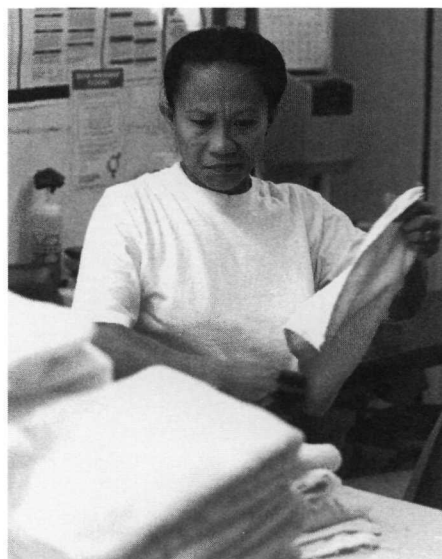
Targeting immigrant workers

The "gold" nowadays, of course, is cheap labor. Entire industries — garment, electronics, meatpacking, agribusiness — maintain their profit margins by specifically targeting immigrant workers as their employees. Immigrants take the low-paying, dangerous jobs that others don't want.

Jane Slaughter is a Detroit-based labor writer. Photographer **Jim West** also works in Detroit.

They run great risks to come to the U.S. — such as traveling in "coffins" — because the abysmal pay they get here is still better than what they could find in their home countries. Once they are here, they put up with injuries, chemicals, and below-poverty-level wages because other jobs are closed to them. Better jobs are beyond reach because of lack of skills, language problems, and, in the case of undocumented workers, fear of discovery.

Certain American industries thrive on that fear.



Worker folds linen in laundry room at Days Inn, Flint, Mich., 1994.

Jim West

"Food processing in America today would collapse were it not for immigrant labor," says Mark Grey of the University of Northern Iowa. Grey has studied the systematic recruitment by Midwestern beef, pork, and poultry packers of Laotian and Latino immigrants, both legal and undocumented.

Meatpacking is the most dangerous

industry in the country. In recent years one after another well-paying, unionized meatpacking plant — employing white, native-born workers — has shut down. They have reopened in smaller towns, offering \$6 an hour to a new type of workforce. In Storm Lake, Iowa, for example, Iowa Beef Processors proffered \$150 bounties to Laotians who recruited relatives to come to work there. The majority of the workforce is now composed of immigrants. Turnover is 80 percent each year.

Similarly, electronics and garment factories deliberately set up in areas of high immigration: Los Angeles, Silicon Valley, New York City. Seventy-seven percent of the lowest-paid jobs in Silicon Valley's computer industry are held by immigrant workers, with employers now preferring Asian women, perceived as more "docile" than Latinas. Half the industrial workers in Los Angeles are Latinos; 87 percent of the apparel workers there are Latinos or Asians.

"Manufacturing in Los Angeles depends on immigrant workers," concludes union organizer Peter Olney. In some major cities, the janitorial workforce — those who clean the big downtown buildings by night — is now mostly Latino immigrants, and the migrant workforce that picks tomatoes, cucumbers, and citrus fruit is essentially all Latino immigrants and their children.

Circumventing sanctions

It's been 11 years since Congress enacted sanctions on employers who hire "illegal" immigrants, touted by conservatives at the time as a means to stop the influx of foreigners. All employers are now required to verify a new-hire's citizenship status, and employers caught with undocumented workers on the payroll may be fined. In practice, these "sanctions" have done nothing to discourage potential immigrants. They are easy to circumvent, as documents are easily counter-

feited. And they are seldom enforced. Employers calculate that the cheap labor is worth the risk of a fine. In New York City, for example, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) collected less than \$5,000 in employer fines in 1996 — even though that year saw a big increase in INS raids on workplaces.

Far from deterring employers from hiring immigrants, the sanctions have actually, in effect, encouraged them to do so. When an employer sees signs of organizing among his immigrant employees, he can threaten to call the INS on himself.

This ensures an intimidated workforce.

“With the help of the INS,” wrote Sasha Khokha of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, “employers can police their workforce at will using the only armed force in the country specifically designed to regulate labor.”

The INS plans to double the number of its agents over the next five years. But, as one undocumented worker from Mexico told *The Nation*, “Everyone knows they are never going to arrest all of us. Who would do this shitty work for them? We know that every now and then the *migra*

will come in and take a few away to keep the politicians happy. That’s how it works.”

Poor pay, dangerous work

This “shitty work” may pay below the minimum wage, for women toiling at home sewing machines or in Chinatown sweatshops in New York or San Francisco. A well-publicized government raid two years ago on an El Monte, Calif., garment sweatshop turned up 70 Thai immigrants being held in slave-like conditions. They were forbidden to leave their combined working and living quar-

‘The enemy in our midst’: an historical note on Detroit’s Polish immigrants

Polish political loyalties at the turn of the century [in Detroit] were complex. When Woodrow Wilson called for volunteers for World War I, 40 percent of the first 100,000 to respond were Polish. However, in 1920, during Eugene Debs’ candidacy for president, many Poles chose not to vote Democrat and voted Socialist. Such a great proportion of the Socialist voters in 1918 were foreign-born that Detroit auto manufacturer William Brush referred to them as the “alien threat” and the “enemy in our midst.” He proposed “the total extermination of such monstrosities in human form.” The American Protective League assigned 4,000 Detroit volunteers to keep watch on the Motor City’s foreigners and radicals.

In 1920, during the Palmer Raids when the federal government ordered the simultaneous arrests of labor activists around the country, some of the socialist literature collected was illegible to the authorities because it was in Polish. And a decade later, when labor strikes began to sweep the country,

Poles played key roles. Detroit’s first, largest and longest sit-down strikes all took place in Poletown’s steel, auto and cigar factories. It was an era when nearly 130 Detroit shops, plants and offices were occupied by workers, an era when 200 shoppers at Woolworth’s, surprised by an unexpected sit-in, chose to stay inside with the strikers after management was locked out. Fighting for the right to unionize became a community occupation that won the support of some Roman Catholic clergy and the government of Hamtramck.

The old order in Detroit — the Protestants who controlled the factories, the newspapers, the court system and city hall — consistently viewed these people as a threat and went to work both to cut off immigration and to pressure immigrants into conforming to their standards. In an article titled “Who Shall Rule?” the Patriotic American editorialized that “we are now simply the waste-house of Europe and the receptacle of its refuse and scum” and that these “semi-barbarous” elements would overwhelm the U.S. and ruin “the perfectly free, modern country that it is,

or used to be, 40 or 50 years ago.”

This attitude on the part of the elite in the Motor City had two effects. It contributed to the politicization of immigrants who quickly perceived themselves as part of an unwelcome class and therefore more willing to challenge management and form unions. And second, it strengthened the Polish community’s tendency to turn inward, resisting any semblance of assimilation, despite pressure to do so. For example, in graduation ceremonies at the Ford English School, an Americanization program run by the Ford Motor Company in 1918, all the participants descended from a boat, crossed a gang plank, and stepped into a 15-foot-wide “melting pot.” The director, Clinton C. DeWitt, explained the pageant that followed: “Six teachers, three on either side, stir the pot with 10-foot ladles, representing nine months of teaching in the school. Into the pot 52 nationalities with their foreign clothes and baggage go, and out of the pot after a vigorous stirring by the teachers comes one nationality.”

— *Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann in Poletown: Community Betrayed (University of Illinois Press, 1989)*

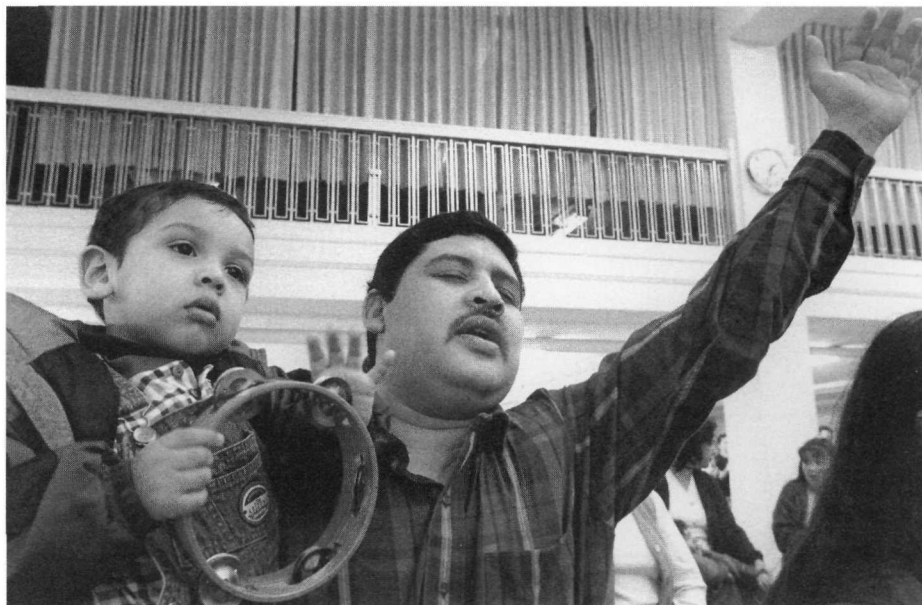
ters, surrounded by razor wire, till they had paid off the cost of their passage to America. One woman had been held for seven years. California State Labor Commissioner Victoria Bradshaw, who led the raid on the sweatshop, professed astonishment at the conditions.

When 209 undocumented meatpackers were arrested in Iowa in 1996, their average pay was found to be \$6.02 an hour, or \$12,521 for the few who manage to work an entire year. The nature of the work — wielding knives on animal carcasses — makes them highly susceptible to repetitive strain injuries, as well as wounds. If they are injured, they are unlikely to get compensation, both because of lack of knowledge of how to work the system, in the case of legal residents, and because of fear of discovery, in the case of illegal ones.

When the janitorial workforce was transformed in the 1980s from native-born to immigrant, wages fell. In Los Angeles, for example, pay dropped from nearly \$10 an hour in 1977 to just over \$6 in 1993 (in 1993 dollars). In Silicon Valley, electronics assemblers earn the lowest wages of any occupation other than food preparation. The solvents and solders they use, often with no gloves, can cause loss of smell and memory, scarring of the lungs or cancer, according to the Santa Clara Center for Occupational Safety and Health.

Toxins are part of the worklife of migrant strawberry pickers, too. In 1996 the California legislature delayed a planned prohibition of deadly methyl bromide, used to kill parasites. And in 1994 the Environmental Protection Agency reduced the amount of time employers must wait before sending workers into fields treated with the fungicide captan, a known carcinogenic. Workers are receiving up to 200 times acceptable doses, says a labor/environmental coalition.

Strawberry workers' average wage is



Stemilt apple packing worker Roberto Guerrero and his son Moses, 2, at the Pentecostal church they attend.

Jim West

\$6.29 an hour, usually from piecework — a 20 percent drop from 20 years ago. Some, the most recent immigrants, sleep in the fields. Workers have sued one company for forcing them to do calisthenics before work and pack berries at the end of the day without pay.

Garment shops use the piecework system, too. Chinese immigrants at Lucky Sewing Co. in Oakland found that a dress for which they were paid \$4 to \$5 retailed for \$175 under the Jessica McClintock label.

The irony of such low wages is that they prevent workers from obtaining legal status for their families. The law says that the person petitioning on behalf of family members must make 125 percent of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, the petitioner would have to earn \$20,062 per year. The average full-time wage for an apple warehouse worker is \$12,000; half that for a picker in the orchards.

An 'explosion' of union organizing
Given the isolation, the language barriers, and the legal problems, it's remark-

able that some of the most exciting — and successful — union organizing in the country is happening among immigrant workers. Janitors, farm workers, drywallers, tortilla delivery drivers, food processors — the 1990s have seen a virtual explosion of militant struggles, including strikes and civil disobedience.

Best known are the 40,000 janitors who've joined the Service Employees union over the last 10 years. The union's Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign avoids the stacked-deck procedures of the National Labor Relations Board and uses marches and community support to pressure owners of big office buildings. In the Century City area of Los Angeles, for example, Central American janitors wearing red bandannas and union T-shirts invaded the swanky watering holes frequented by yuppie executives during happy hour. Their strike won them a contract. JfJ is now organizing in Sacramento, suburban Philadelphia, Washington, D.C. and suburban Denver.

The union is using a second pressure tactic: asking large stockholders to use

their influence with janitors' recalcitrant employers. The Episcopal Church Pension Fund is one such large stockholder [see *TW* 10/97 and 11/97]. After producing by 80 bishops, Fund managers have agreed to meet with representatives of janitors seeking a union contract in Washington, D.C.

Midwestern migrant farm workers, through their union, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), have done away with the archaic sharecropping system on tomato farms. Through both their own organizing and a large dose of church support, they forced the large tomato-buying corporations — Campbell, Heinz — to sign three-way agreements with the union and small family farmers. Now FLOC is targeting cucumber workers in North Carolina. Last year, 150 tortilla drivers in Los Angeles won a 46-day strike and a 24 percent pay increase. Three years earlier, disgusted with arbitrary firings and no pay for overtime, they had begun meeting in secret. They went looking for a union, and found Teamsters Local 63.

"Unions aren't really targeting the immigrant community," says Joel Ochoa, who works for a Teamster-backed organizing center. "Immigrant workers are organizing themselves, and going to unions for assistance."

'Ecclesiastes says the union is good'

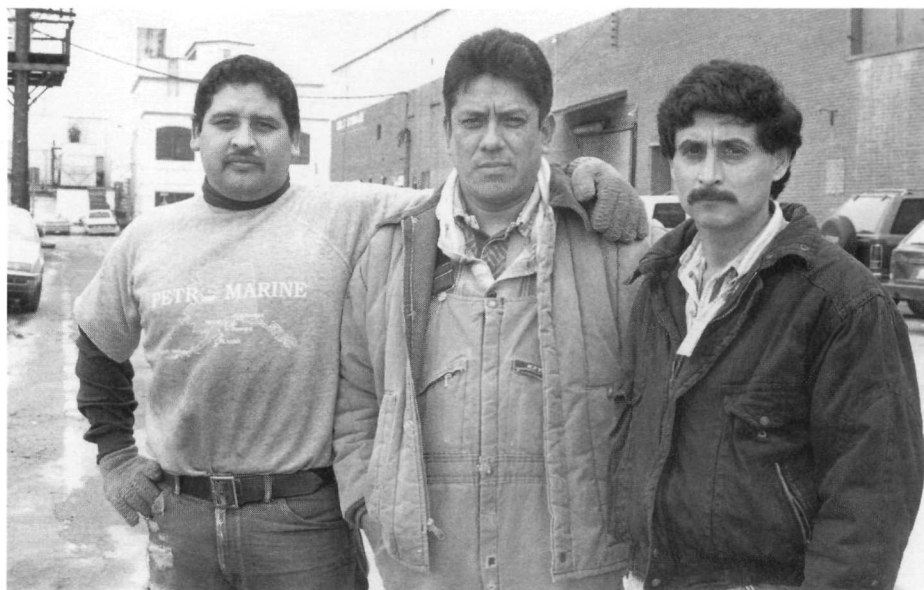
The apple warehouses of central Washington are yet another battleground. A majority of workers at two key companies have signed with the Teamsters, but

owners have fired key leaders and refused to recognize the union. At the same time, the organizing has already had a positive effect, with the company giving a 35-cent wage increase, a week's vaca-

ward for their labor. And verse 12, it says, 'If one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.'

"That is the union. If I go in front of the boss, he fires me, but if we go with 20 or 40 or 50 guys together, he don't fire us so easy." **TW**

Workplace struggles of immigrants are noted for relying on community support, and church support in particular. To find out what is happening in your city, contact the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights for the



Roberto Guerrero with Manuel Granados and Miguel Pineda in front of the Stemilt apple packing plant where they work.

Jim West

tion, and a Christmas party. The union has a monthly radio show in Spanish. They've enlisted religious leaders to lead rallies and speak from the pulpit. In August, workers marched on their employers to demand a contract, setting up a "bargaining table" and folding chairs outside company headquarters.

Roberto Guerrero was one of them. He and his wife Carmen have five kids. He makes \$8.41 an hour now—but he's among the higher paid workers because he's been on the job for eight years. — they get a 10-cent raise each year.

An ardent Pentecostal Christian, Guerrero's pro-union rap is sprinkled with allusions to God's will. "Ecclesiastes says the union is good, you know," he contends.

"Chapter 4, verse 9 says two are better than one; because they have a good re-

name of a local pro-immigrant coalition. 3108th St., Suite 307, Oakland, CA 94607; 510-465-1984; <nnirr@nnirr.org>.

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The Witness

Campaign to boycott 'sweatshop gifts'

A broad coalition of religious, human rights and labor groups is calling on American consumers to "shop with their consciences," not their pocketbooks, during the holidays.

The Holiday Season of Conscience, kicked off in Madison, Wis., and in more than 40 other towns and cities across the country last October, promotes awareness of child labor and sweatshop abuses under which many imported products are manufactured. It has a simple message: The small decisions consumers make every day tie into a much larger picture.

"The purpose is not to overwhelm people," said Angel Adams, a member of Madison's University Community Church, who helped organize the Madison events.

"You can't monitor every piece of clothing you buy, but you can start with things that are in the range of your control," she added.

Sweatshops vaulted into public visibility a year ago, thanks to the National Labor Committee, an independent human rights organization and the chief architect of the Holiday Season of Conscience Campaign. Committee director Charles Kernaghan drew publicity to the issue after writing a letter to Kathie Lee Gifford criticizing the working conditions in factories in Honduras, where he said young women worked long hours for little pay to assemble clothing for Gifford's Wal-Mart-sponsored clothing label.

The Holiday Season of Conscience campaign is endorsed by more than 120 organizations including the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, Catholic and Jewish groups, Unitarian

churches, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and the People of Faith Network.

"People can say 'no' to child labor because children belong in school. People can say 'no' to the exploitation of teen-aged girls forced to work long hours in sweatshop conditions under armed guards and threat of sexual abuse [and they] can say 'no' to workers being stripped of their rights and fined or blacklisted when they try to organize to defend their rights," United Methodist Bishop Fritz Mutti of Topeka, Kan., told a Topeka news conference announcing the Rural Religion and Labor Council's endorsement of the campaign.

Many of the companies under fire for labor abuses have corporate codes of conduct requiring safe workplaces, reasonable work hours, and sufficient pay. But according to Kernaghan, the codes are often "100 percent public relations."

Most of the codes, he said, have not been translated into foreign languages. Factory workers often don't know who they work for, much less that certain rights are provided for them under company policy.

Employers criticized by the National Labor Committee include Disney, the Gap, Wal-Mart, Nike and Reebok — corporations Kernaghan said should be concerned about protecting more than their copyrights.

"Think how stupid this is: Labels are protected under trade laws, but not the workers," Kernaghan said. "On a can of tuna we can look at it and tell if dolphins were hurt, but when we buy clothes we can't tell if they were made overseas by children. It's asinine."

On a visit to Haiti last year, Kernaghan said he found Disney workers who were

earning 28 cents an hour and living in one-room huts with dirt floor and roofs that leaked every time it rained.

Wages aren't the only concern, however.

Meg Lewis, director of the Colombia Support Network in Madison, said the young women working in Colombian greenhouses must also worry about their health.

"The greenhouses use pesticides illegal in the U.S.," she said. "Workers get leukemia and cancer. Their children have high rates of birth defects, and the pesticides get into the drinking water."

The White House, in an effort to insure consumers are able to tell whether products are made under fair, decent labor conditions, last year set up the Apparel Industry Partnership. Jonathan D. Rosenblum, a legal counsel for the International Labor Rights Fund, said talks between human rights groups and corporations are in their final stages.

One proposal before the group is for independent monitoring of factories overseas by religious or human rights groups.

In October, Congress sent President Clinton a bill limiting imports of goods produced by "forced or indentured child labor." Lawmakers estimated the U.S. currently imports about \$100 million worth of such products each year.

Kernaghan is confident the American public — "decent people with a sense of justice" — will stand behind the campaign.

"No one wants to buy something made in a sweatshop," he said. "To say it's close to slavery wouldn't be overstating it."

— Sonya Jongsma,
Religion News Service

The birth pains of a new America: an interview with Richard Rodriguez

by Scott London

When Richard Rodriguez entered first grade at Sacred Heart School in Sacramento, Calif., his English vocabulary consisted of barely 50 words. All his classmates were white. Rodriguez went on to earn degrees in English at Stanford and philosophy at Columbia. He then pursued a doctorate in English Renaissance literature at Berkeley and spent a year in London on a Fulbright scholarship.

Though Rodriguez had his sights set on a career in academia, he abruptly went his own way in 1976. Supporting himself by freelance writing and various temporary jobs, he spent the next five years coming to terms with how education had irrevocably altered his life. His first book, *The Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Bantam), appeared in 1982. It was a searching account of his journey from being a “socially disadvantaged child” to a fully assimilated American, from the Spanish-speaking world of his family to the wider, presumably freer, public life promised him by English. While the book generated widespread critical acclaim and won several literary awards, it also stirred up resentment among those offended by Rodriguez’s strong stand against bilingual education and affirmative action. Some Mexican-Americans called him pocho — traitor — accusing him of betraying himself and his people. Others called him a “coconut” — brown on the outside, white on the inside. He calls

himself “a comic victim of two cultures.”

Rodriguez explores the dilemmas of ethnicity and cultural identity more directly in his latest book, *Days Of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (Viking). “The best metaphor of America remains the dreadful metaphor — the Melting Pot,” he writes. The America that Rodriguez describes is a new cross-fertilizing culture, a culture of half-breeds, blurred boundaries, and bizarre extremes.

Rodriguez is an editor for the *Pacific News Service* in San Francisco and a contributing editor of *Harper’s* and the *Sunday “Opinion”* section of the *Los Angeles Times*. His essays also appear on public television’s *NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer.

Maybe we’re losing the American Dream because we are not like our Swedish grandmother who came across the plains, hacked down the trees, and took the Spanish words she encountered and made them hers. Now her great-great-grandchildren sit terrified wondering what to do with all these Mexicans.

Scott London works for KCBX Public Radio in Santa Barbara, Calif. Jim West is a Detroit photographer and artist Edward Bisone lives in Santa Ana, Calif.

Scott London: In *Days of Obligation*, you write about spending a week in the “twin cities” of Tijuana and San Diego. It

occurs to me that if you take these two cities as one, the combination offers a glimpse of what America might look like in the 21st century.

Richard Rodriguez: Absolutely. Of course, San Diego chooses not to regard the two cities as one. Talk about alter ego: Tijuana was created by the lust of San Diego. Everything that was illegal in San Diego was permitted in Tijuana. When boxing was illegal in San Diego, there were boxing matches in Tijuana; when gambling was illegal, when drinking was illegal, when whores were illegal, there was always Tijuana. Mexicans would say, “We’re not responsible for Tijuana; it’s the Americans who created it.” And there was some justification for that. But, in fact, the whore was a Mexican, the bartender a Mexican. Tijuana was this lovely meeting of Protestant hypocrisy with Catholic cynicism: The two cities went to bed and both denied it in the morning.

To this day, you will see American teenagers going to Mexico on Saturday nights to get drunk. Mexico gives them permission. The old Southern Catholic tradition gives permission to the Northern Protestant culture to misbehave. But what has happened in the last 25 years is that Tijuana has become a new Third World capital — much to the chagrin of Mexico City, which is more and more aware of how little it controls Tijuana politically and culturally. In addition to the whorehouses and discos, Tijuana now has Korean factories and Japanese industrialists and Central American refugees, and a new Mexican bourgeoisie that takes its lessons from cable television.

And then there is San Diego — this retirement village, with its prim petticoat, that doesn’t want to get too near the water. San Diego worries about all the turds washing up on the lovely, pristine beaches of La Jolla. San Diego wishes Mexico would have fewer babies. And

San Diego, like the rest of America, is growing middle-aged. The average age in the U.S. is now 33, whereas Mexico gets younger and younger, retreats deeper and deeper into adolescence. Mexico is 15. Mexico is wearing a Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt and wandering around Tijuana looking for a job, for a date, for something to put on her face to take care of the acne.

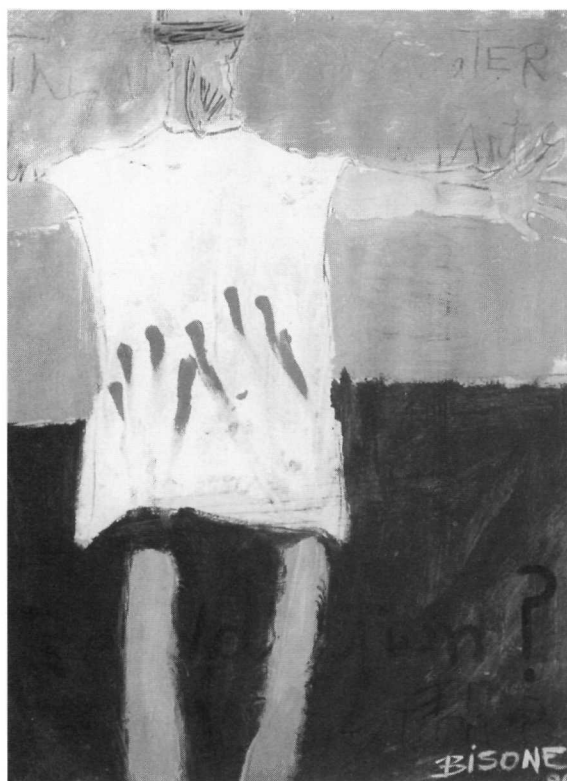
It is not simply that these two cities are perched side by side at the edge of the Pacific; it is that adolescence sits next to middle age, and they don't know how to relate to each other. In a way, these two cities exist in different centuries. San Diego is a post-industrial city talking about settling down, slowing down, building clean industry. Tijuana is a pre-industrial city talking about changing, moving forward, growing. Yet they form a single metropolitan area.

S.L.: We hear a lot of rhetoric these days about "restoring the American Dream." But the American Dream seems to be alive and well in Tijuana.

R.R.: Very much so. Maybe the American Dream is too rich for us now in the U.S. Maybe we're losing it because we are not like our Swedish grandmother who came across the plains, hacked down the trees, and took the Spanish words she encountered and made them hers. Now her great-great-grandchildren sit terrified wondering what to do with all these Mexicans. The American Dream is an impossible affirmation of possibility. And maybe native-born Americans don't have it anymore. Maybe it has run through their fingers.

Those people who say that America is finite are in some sense right. The environmental movement, for example, has a great wisdom to it: We need to protect, to preserve, to shelter as much as we need to develop. But I think this always has to be juxtaposed against the optimism of old,

which is now represented in part by immigrants. I would like to see America achieve a kind of balance between optimism and tragedy, between possibility and skepticism.



T-shirt

Edward Bisone

S.L.: Why do we always talk about race in this country strictly in terms of black and white?

R.R.: America has never had a very wide vocabulary for miscegenation. We say we like diversity, but we don't like the idea that our Hispanic neighbor is going to marry our daughter. America has nothing like the Spanish vocabulary for miscegenation. *Mulatto*, *mestizo*, *Creole* — these Spanish and French terms suggest, by their use, that miscegenation is a fact of life. America has only black and white. In 18th-century America, if you had any drop of African blood in you, you were black.

After the O.J. Simpson trial there was talk about how the country was splitting

in two — one part black, one part white. It was ludicrous: typical gringo arrogance. It's as though whites and blacks can imagine America only in terms of each other. It's mostly white arrogance, in that it places whites always at the center of the racial equation. But lots of emerging racial tensions in California have nothing to do with whites. Filipinos and Samoans are fighting it out in San Francisco high schools. Merced is becoming majority Mexican and Cambodian. They may be fighting in gangs right now, but I bet they are also learning each other's language. Cultures, when they meet, influence one another, whether people like it or not. But Americans don't have any way of describing this secret that has been going on for over two hundred years. The intermarriage of the Indian and the African in America, for example, has been constant and thorough. Colin Powell tells us in his autobiography that he is Scotch, Irish, African, Indian, and British, but all we hear is that he is African.

S.L.: The latest census figures show that two-thirds of children who are the products of a union between a black and a white call themselves black.

R.R.: The census bureau is thinking about creating a new category because so many kids don't know how to describe themselves using the existing categories. I call these kids the "Keanu Reeves Generation," after the actor who has a Hawaiian father and a Welsh mother. Most American Hispanics don't belong to one race, either. I keep telling kids that, when filling out forms, they should put "yes" to everything — yes, I am Chinese; yes, I am African; yes, I am white; yes, I am a Pacific Islander; yes, yes, yes — just to befuddle the bureaucrats who think we live separately from one another.

S.L.: There is a lot of talk today about the "hyphenating" of America. We no longer

speaking of ourselves as just Americans — now we're Italian-Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, even Anglo-Americans.

R.R.: The fact that we're all hyphenating our names suggests that we are afraid of being assimilated. I was talking on the BBC recently, and this woman introduced me as being "in favor of assimilation." I said, "I'm not in favor of assimilation." I am no more in favor of assimilation than I am in favor of the Pacific Ocean. Assimilation is not something to oppose or favor — it just happens.

S.L.: *Time* magazine did a special issue on the global village a couple of years ago. The cover photo was a computer composite of different faces from around the world. It was a stunning picture — neither man nor woman, black nor white. This is the kind of assimilation that many worry about — the loss of things that make us separate and unique.

R.R.: Jose Vasconcelos, Mexico's great federalist and apologist, has coined a wonderful term, *la raza cosmica*, "the cosmic race," a new people having not one race but many in their blood.

But Mexicans who come to America today end up opposing assimilation. They say they are "holding on to their culture." To them, I say, "If you really wanted to hold on to your culture, you would be in favor of assimilation. You would be fearless about swallowing English and about becoming Americanized. You would be much more positive about the future, and much less afraid. That's what it means to be Mexican."

I'm constantly depressed by the Mexican gang members I meet in East L.A. who essentially live their lives inside five or six blocks. They are caught in some tiny ghetto of the mind that limits them to these five blocks because, they say, "I'm Mexican. I live here." And I say, "What do you mean you live here — five blocks? Your granny, your *abuelita*, walked two

thousand miles to get here. She violated borders, moved from one language to another, moved from a 16th-century village to a 21st-century city, and you live within five blocks? You don't know Mexico, man. You have trivialized Mexico. You are a fool about Mexico if you think that Mexico is five blocks. That is not Mexico; that is some crude Americanism you have absorbed."

S.L.: You have described Los Angeles as the symbolic capital of the U.S.

R.R.: I find L.A. very interesting, partly because I think something new is forming there, but not in a moment of good fellowship as you might think from all this "diversity" claptrap. It's not as if we'll all go down to the Civic Center in our ethnic costumes and dance around.

We're looking at blond kids in Beverley Hills who can speak Spanish because they have been raised by Guatemalan nannies. We're looking at Evangelicals coming up from Latin America to convert the U.S. at the same time that L.A. movie stars are taking up Indian pantheism.

After the L.A. riots in 1992, my sense was not that the city was dying, as the expert opinion had it, but that the city was being formed. What was dying was the idea that L.A. was a city of separate suburbs and freeway exits. What burned in that riot was the idea that the east side was far away from the west side. People went to bed that first night watching television, watching neighborhoods they had never seen before, streets they had never

been on, and they were chagrined and horrified by what they saw. Sometime in the middle of the night they could hear the sirens and smell the smoke, and realized that the fire was coming toward them — that the street they lived on, the boulevard they used everyday, was in fact connected to a part of town where they had never been before, and that part of town was now a part of their lives.

That moment of fear, of terror, of sleeplessness, was not a death, but the birth of the idea that L.A. is a single city, a single metropolitan area.

What we have seen in the last three or four years is, if not optimistic, at least something very young and full of possibility. Women have been telling men forever that childbirth is painful, that life begins with a scream, not with little butterflies and little tweeting birds; life begins with a scream. In 1992, L.A. came to life with a scream.

S.L.: If L.A. represents the future, does that mean we're looking at more riots?

R.R.: We're looking at complexity. We're looking at blond kids in Beverley Hills who can speak Spanish because they have been raised by Guatemalan nannies. We're looking at Evangelicals coming up from Latin America to convert the U.S. at the same time that L.A. movie stars are taking up Indian pantheism. We're looking at such enormous complexity and variety that it makes a mockery of "celebrating diversity." In the L.A. of the future, no one will need to say, "Let's celebrate diversity." Diversity is going to be a fundamental part of our lives.

If you want to live in Tennessee, God bless you, I wish for you a long life and starry evenings. But that is not where I want to live my life. I want to live my life in Carthage, in Athens. I want to live my life in Rome. I want to live my life in the center of the world. I want to live my life in Los Angeles. **TV**

Ecumenical Year of Churches in Solidarity with Uprooted People

In September 1995, the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee adopted a statement entitled: "A Moment to Choose: Risking to be with Uprooted People." The statement was the product of an 18-month process of seeking contributions from WCC member churches — now numbering 330 in more than 100 countries — ecumenical organizations and many others. The Central Committee also adopted a set of related resolutions, including one designating 1997 as an Ecumenical Year for Churches in Solidarity with the Uprooted.

Since then, the WCC Refugee and Migration Service has focused its attention on promoting the statement and related recommendations and assisting churches to engage with the issues. Production of a resource book called "A Moment to Choose: Risking to be with Uprooted People" was a major element of that effort. Pointing out that nearly one in every 50 people in the world today is a refugee or internally displaced or a migrant, the book aims to help policy makers and academics as well as all who wish to understand the causes and consequences of the forced displacement of people. It also challenges the churches to prophetic and practical responses that promote human dignity and sustainable communities, citing over 50 "Signs of Hope," concrete examples of groups involved in various work with uprooted people.

During the ecumenical year news of an additional "sign of hope" came

from Madras, where the new government lifted a six-year Tamil Nadu State Ban on access to secondary education for Tamil Sri Lankan refugees. The Bishop of Madras promptly issued a circular to the Board of Higher Education and other heads of institutions in the Madras Diocese urging them to assist refugee students by granting them admission to their schools — and to also provide concessions with regards to fees. According to a WCC report, this response significantly raised the morale of the refugees.

Activities related to the ecumenical year were largely focused on raising awareness through ecumenical assemblies and worship. In Africa, for example, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) launched the year in Nairobi last June. AACC Vice President, Mary Auma Jalango, stressed the need by all concerned to address the root causes of uprootedness and create conditions conducive to peaceful resolution of conflicts during the launching ceremony. AACC Secretary General, Jose Chipenda, noted that "Africa is bleeding and the church cannot remain neutral."

Twelve thousand delegates also attended the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, Austria, last summer, committing themselves to "champion the dignity and protect the rights of refugees, migrants and displaced persons, and to uphold the right of refugees to asylum and free place of residence." A forum on the spiritual dimension of uprootedness was planned following a conference held by the New South Wales Ecumenical Council on "Accompaniment." Related

to this theme is a collection of poems and pictures of art by uprooted people being put together by the WCC as "a way of expressing their spirituality, their experiences, hopes, and talents." This resource is to be published by the WCC in March/April 1998.

As part of its participation in the ecumenical year, Amnesty International published a 140-page report entitled, "Refugees — Human Rights have no Borders." This document is available in various languages from Amnesty's 54 national sections (addresses available from the WCC Refugee and Migration service, see below).

Likewise, a very helpful 343-page annotated bibliography called *Women Refugees in International Perspectives, 1980-1990*, was published by the UNHCR Research Resource Division of Refugees with assistance from the UNHCR Centre for Documentation and Research. The book contains a foreword by Rita Reddy, UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women, and offers comprehensive abstracts of books, articles, analyses and field reports about women refugees in countries of origin, asylum and resettlement.

For more information on these and other resources related to refugee issues contact the Refugee and Migration Service, Unit IV, World Council of Churches, P.O.Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland. Phone is (41-22) 791 63 23, fax is (41-22) 788 00 67, and e-mail is <rms@info.wcc-coe.org>.

Changing status

by Jo Salas

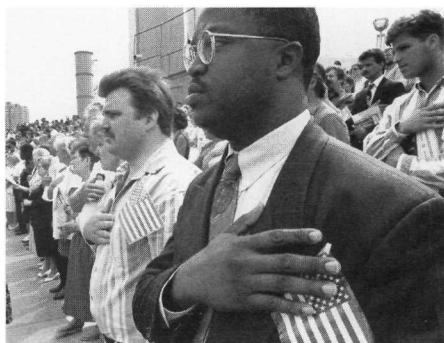
Last spring I became an American citizen. The swearing-in ceremony I attended in New York City was the culmination not only of the year-and-a-half long application process but also of my 25 years as a permanent resident.

After the 1994 election, when the newly Republican-dominated congress began to target legal aliens along with other marginalized people, I decided it was time to change my status.

In spite of this sense of political urgency, I found as I went along that I was ready, somewhat to my surprise, to celebrate this decision as a gesture of commitment, like a couple who decides to get married after long years of living together.

I didn't know what to expect from the naturalization ceremony. In movies there always seems to be a group of immigrants with tears in their eyes, a kindly judge, friends and relatives in the background ready with hugs and cameras. Having had dealings with the Immigration and Naturalization Service I knew it wouldn't be quite like that. But I was looking forward to the acknowledgment of a turning point.

My husband and I arrived at Police Plaza in downtown Manhattan a little before 8 a.m., as directed, having left home in the Mid-Hudson Valley at dawn. There were already about 300 people lined up outside the door. A hundred and fifty more joined the line behind us. Most appeared to be from Southeast Asia, Central America, the Caribbean. We were among the very few white people that I could see and judging by the accents I was the only New Zealander. Everyone



Michael Adeyoku of Ann Arbor, Mich., at a swearing in ceremony where he became a U.S. citizen. A native of Nigeria, he had been in the U.S. for 13 years. Jim West

was neatly, even elegantly dressed.

For a long time the line didn't move at all. Then we began to inch our way forward as a policewoman strode up and down admonishing us to take anything metallic out of our pockets so as not to hold up the security machine. It took more than an hour to get inside. We were lucky that it was neither raining nor freezing cold.

At the entrance to the auditorium a woman relieved me of my green card and another handed me a certificate of citizenship. My husband and the other escorts were sent upstairs and I sat down between two strangers in the vast wood-panelled hall. The decor of outsize flags and shields proclaimed that we were in the headquarters of the NYPD — that well-known breeding ground of exemplary citizenship.

When everyone was seated a young man appeared on the stage. "There's no eating or drinking in this auditorium," he said without preamble. "No gum wrappers or garbage on the floor."

These were the first words addressed to us as a group. I looked around at my fellow immigrants. Every one of us had gone through a lengthy and demanding process to have arrived at this point. Who knows what some had undergone before that, in their departure from their homelands and their entrance to this country? I felt angry on their behalf as well as my own to be spoken to as if we were heedless second-graders, or worse, as if we were inferior and ignorant. A woman official, kinder and more respectful, instructed us on how to sign our citizenship certificates. "You can do it at your leisure, maybe sit down with a cup of tea," she said. The young man cut in. "You sign your full name. That means if you have two names, you sign two names. If you have five names, you sign five." His tone was unmistakably contemptuous.

We sat there for another half an hour. Then Mr. Gum Wrapper addressed us again. "Put away your newspapers and magazines," he said, although no one I could see was doing anything but waiting.

The ceremony was conducted by another woman, introduced as a supervising district adjudicating officer for the INS. She stressed our good fortune in becoming citizens of "the world's greatest nation" and exhorted us to behave ourselves and obey the laws. There was no hint that we might bring something of

*I was left wanting an
experience of welcome.*

value to our adopted country, that the good fortune might be on both sides, that

immigration was integral to the heart and the history of this society.

We stood up for the 140-word oath that inducted us as U.S. citizens. They had passed out printed copies of it but there were not nearly enough to go around. We echoed the words phrase by phrase. Most of the people were clearly not native English speakers. I wondered

Jo Salas lives in New Paltz, N.Y.

if they all understood the meaning of words like “abjure” and “potentate.” One of the women on stage led us in singing *The Star Spangled Banner*. She had a good voice and sang with gusto into the microphone while the roomful of people mumbled along. It’s not an easy tune and the language is hard to follow. I had never paid close attention before to the words that come after “Oh say can you see.” The warlike imagery was disturbing to me.

They invited us to congratulate the new citizens on each side of us. By then I was rather dispirited, but I didn’t want to snub the people beside me, and actually I was glad when I looked into their faces and shook their hands.

Then it was over, as perfunctorily as it had begun. Mr. Gum Wrapper told us sternly to remain in our seats until our row was dismissed. The Middle Eastern man on my right was bewildered. “It is ended?” he asked me. Like him, I was left wanting something else, an experience of welcome, perhaps, or of being honored, an appropriate marking of this transition. Instead, I felt insulted and sad. I don’t think it would have taken much to transform the effect of this ceremony, just an attitude of respect and an appreciation that we have come to join you, to add our gifts to yours.

In the lobby outside I saw no hugs, no proud photos being taken. We left as quickly as we could.

Postscript: My congressman, Maurice Hinchey, sent a copy of this article to Doris Meissner, Commissioner of the INS, accompanied by his own letter appealing for change—suggesting that all immigrants be able to attend naturalization ceremonies in their own communities rather than in huge impersonal centers. Whether as a direct result of this or not, I recently heard from a friend that he became a U.S. citizen in a small, local ceremony which was respectful, satisfying and even moving. **TRW**

‘Rainbow Liberalism’ digging own grave

If the old left assigned the vanguard role to factory workers, says Michael Lind, the New Left assigns it to people of color. The strategy of rainbow liberalism rests on two assumptions, Lind says: “The first is that conservatism would not appeal to nonwhite Americans. The second is that the very policies that promote the rainbow strategy — affirmative action and high immigration — would not produce tensions among the multicultural rainbow’s constituent bands. If these assumptions are wrong, then rainbow liberalism is digging its own grave. They are, and it is.”

Lind notes that:

- black voters remain committed to the Democratic Party, but a majority of Asian-Americans voted for Bush in 1992, while Hispanics gave Democrats only about 60 percent of the vote that year;
- in a recent poll, non-Hispanic blacks favor deep cuts in immigration by a ratio of 11-to-1, while Hispanic Americans favor such cuts by 7-to-1;
- in taking over the Democratic Party, the civil rights coalition drove enough white Southerners and working-class Northern Catholics into the GOP to permit the Republicans to dominate first the presidency and now congress.

What is needed, concludes Lind, is an alternative American liberalism, or liberal populism, that rejects the rainbow strategy in order to concentrate on the interests of working Americans from all backgrounds.

“If immigration policy is considered as it should be — a form of labor policy — then the ‘liberal’ approach ought to be to minimize the immigration of low-wage workers who might compete with the American working poor,” Lind says. “The left too often forgets that voluntary immigrants have come here — whether from Germany, Ireland, Mexico or China — because they want to become Americans. ... Liberals who generally favor personal choices have no business condemning as ‘inauthentic’ immigrants who choose to adopt America’s mongrel

culture as their own.”

Lind also notes that “it is easy to stick with the old rainbow strategy and hope that in time nonwhite majorities will bring about the repeatedly deferred revolution, just as it is easy to continue to treat inherited racial categories and alliances as facts of nature, rather than as constructs serving time-bound strategies. Easy, but disastrous — for the rejection of strategy is itself a strategy for defeat.”

— *Mother Jones*, 9-10/97

Activist cookbook

The Activist Cookbook is a guide to creative political action. Recently published by the Boston-based group United for a Fair Economy, the book offers hundreds of ideas to help activists liven up.

In his foreword to the book, Jim Hightower writes, “A little spirited cleverness is what has often been the difference in our history between earnest, wrinkle-browed reform efforts that just sat there stewing in their own juices and those reform efforts that caught the imagination of a larger public and became movements that actually reformed something.”

Author Andrew Boyd says he wanted “to create something like a toolbox, a hands-on manual, something you can just pull out and use.”

The cookbook provides a survey of creative actions including media stunts, guerrilla and street theater, billboard correction, commotions and provocations, and saturation postering. It gives examples of how art and humor can make agitating for economic justice more fun, and more appealing. For more information, write 37 Temple Place, Fifth Floor, Boston, MA 02111, or call 617-423-2148.

— *The Progressive*, 9/97

short takes

Expansion, not independence, the chief hope behind IARCA

by Richard A. Bower

There is a song from the Misa Salvadoreña that is popular among Central American Christians:

*Cuando el pobre cree en el pobre,
ya podremos cantar libertad.*

(When the poor believe in themselves,
then we will be able to sing of liberation.)

The Anglican church in Central America is mostly a poor church working among the poor. Rooted in colonialism, it developed the historic habit of dependency. In recent years, however, the Central American Episcopal Church has struggled to move beyond this colonial and dependent way of being, establishing an indigenous church with local leadership, local theologies and local ways of celebrating.

Five national churches have joined to make a new Anglican Province, *La Iglesia Anglicana de la Region Central de las Americas* (IARCA). Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama form the beginnings of this new Province. Honduras, for the time being, is relating to the new Province as an observer and neighbor, sharing in much of the life of IARCA until such time as she, too, chooses to become a full member.

In July, 1997, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church granted permission for these five dioceses to form a new Province, joining the 22 other provinces of the Anglican Communion world-wide.

Richard A. Bower is dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, in Syracuse, N.Y.

"When the poor begin to believe in themselves... ." The process toward autonomy has been a journey of over 40

The call is to evangelize, to share God's Good News of love, compassion, of dignity and empowerment, and of justice and liberation for people long put down — to share this message by word and action, in the way that only a truly indigenous church can share it.

years, a process and struggle to believe that a Central American region with its own agenda and leadership can blossom as a unique, rich flower in the garden of Anglicanism. It is a church beginning to believe in itself.

But there remain weeds in the garden, risks and fears that continue to shape the way Central American churches relate to each other and to the North. Each country in Central America is unique, with its own history, culture and version of the Spanish language. Most have been through years of civil war and political unrest, often with struggles across borders. Always aware of U.S. imperial intentions and arrogance toward this "banana republic" region, our churches in the South look towards us at this time of transition with caution and ambivalence.

Some of our churches in IARCA are made up of people from the Islands, *antillanos* with long histories and deep commitments to the Anglican Church.

Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras and, to a small extent, Guatemala, all have Caribbean coast lines. For generations people from Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and other islands came to settle, work and find a new life on the Central American coast. They were the workers, the builders of railways and canals, harvesters of coffee and cane.

Towns with lilting names like Bluefields, Aspenwall, Rainbow City and Corn Island litter the landscape of these Latin American countries, reflecting the influence over the years of Caribbean immigration.

El Salvador, alone, has no Caribbean coast, and therefore little Afro-Caribbean influence in the church. One of the tensions IARCA lives with is the tension between cultures: Caribbean, Afro-Antillean, Latin, *mezitizo* and native cultures and languages. Quiché, Mesquito, Guayamí, Kuna Yala, Pipíl and other indigenous folk populate our churches, bringing both the richness of their spiritualities and tragic memories of the past.

The economics of the churches that make up IARCA are uneven. Some dioceses come with established patrimonies, with resources to help them toward self-sufficiency. Others have hardly the last small bank deposit with which they try to pay their employees. Some live with relatively stable national economies; others bleed from high rates of inflation and the painful "neo-liberal" economics that enrich the rich and deepen the poverty of the poor, in the name of free enterprise, capitalism, and privatization of essential government services.

Interestingly, the items that for a while stalled the decision of General Convention to grant autonomy were economic: What do we do about a pension plan for the region? What do we do about on-going financial support for IARCA? How long will financial support be needed? How can the Episcopal Church promise anything beyond the next three years?

In 1947 the Anglican Churches of Central America were "handed over" by

the Church of England to the care of the Episcopal Church. At that time almost the entire region became a missionary district of the Episcopal Church. In 1967 national churches were formed in each republic, with the anticipation that each church would choose its local bishop and other leaders from the people and culture.

In 1970 Costa Rica became an autonomous church (extra provincial), while the Ninth Province of the Episcopal Church was formed from the other Mezo, Central and South American Churches, along with the Spanish-speaking churches of the Caribbean region. The Ninth Province became the place to try out visions and models for the church of the future in that region. From 1984 to 1994 proposals for autonomy were submitted to the General Convention of our church.

The desire for autonomy has not been a desire primarily for independence. Rather the motivation has been for the expansion of the Church in Central America. The call is to evangelize, to share God's Good News of love, compassion, dignity and empowerment, and of justice and liberation for people long put down — to share this message by word and action, in the way that only a truly indigenous church can share it. Autonomy is a movement toward identifying local theologies, local spirituality, local ways of worshipping and governing: ways appropriate for the culture, history and context of Central American peoples. The growth of the church is not merely for the purpose of expansion, but rather for reaching the thousands of people in the region who have no accompaniment, care, support or pastoral presence. The abandoned ones. The forgotten.

In spite of the clear reasons for autonomy, the process in Central America has often been full of doubt and fear. "How will we (Central Americans) survive economically without strong connections to the U.S. Church? Can the Episcopal Church be trusted to keep a long-term covenant with us? What will happen to us in our own local, Roman Catholic cultures, where we are often oppressed by religious

and political powers, when we no longer have the patronage of the Episcopal church to protect us? Will we be forgotten in the press of many needs throughout the worldwide Anglican Communion? How will we manage our own affairs across national boundaries, within a region of strong leaders vying for influence in a



Stephanie Bower

newly emerging church?

For the moment IARCA will be a church truly self-governing, but not self-sufficient. It is hard to have one without the other, but this seems to be the best next step toward full autonomy.

Autonomy is perhaps not the best word to use to describe the theological and political vision of IARCA. It is not separation that is longed for, but a change in relationship and maturity: a change

from being a daughter church, to being a sister.

Cuando el pobre cree en el pobre ...when the poor begin to believe in themselves," says the song. When what has been seen as weakness becomes a source of dignity, when dependency grows into self-sufficiency, when fear turns into empowerment, when failure turns into cherishing, when individualism and isolation emerge into community, when a tragic past becomes a hopeful future — then a people know that the Good News is being proclaimed and lived out among them.

One of the losses we in the Episcopal Church will experience in the emergence of IARCA is the loss of the regular, active participation and witness of Central American sisters and brothers in the life and mission of our church. The Churches of IARCA have helped us to keep our eyes and hearts open to the South, helped to keep our conscience and commitment to the liberation of the poor and marginal alive and finely tuned. It will be hard to sustain this attention without Central American leadership actively participating in the ongoing councils of our church. We have often been "evangelized" by the presence of our Central American friends.

Antonio Machado, poet and visionary, once said "*No hay camino. Se hace el camino al andar.*" "There is no road. The road is made by walking." Autonomy — or, better, a newly framed partnership between our Central American sisters and brothers and us — is a road we've never yet taken.

There is no map, only this beginning of a faithful journey.

Bishops link debt to sex

Emerging from a closed meeting in Dallas, Tex., a group of 50 Anglican bishops and archbishops from 16 nations issued a strong statement last September that claimed direct links between the issues of international debt and sexual morality, both likely topics at next summer's Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops.

"It is not acceptable for a pro-gay agenda to be smuggled into the church's program or foisted upon our people," the bishops said.

The four-day "Anglican Life and Witness Conference" was jointly sponsored by the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and the Ekklesia Society, a member of the American Anglican Council.

— ENS

Why I chant

by Bill Jordan

Like most people, I suppose, I tend to be uncomfortable with silence, probably because it has become such a rarity, a warning that something is missing or has gone wrong. Certainly silence does have its dark side, companion to loneliness, isolation, emptiness. The prisoner suffers the tormenting silence of lost companionship, lost opportunity, lost pleasure.

But, as the Psalms reassure us, "The Lord sets the prisoner free." Odd as it may seem, one way of achieving freedom is through silence itself. The silence of the prisoner and the silence of the contemplative are very different from each other. Whereas the punitive silence of the prison cell is involuntary, empty and despairing, the contemplative silence of the monastic cell is voluntary, full and hopeful.

How do we arrive at this blessed, fruitful state? I have found Gregorian chant to be a form of contemplative prayer that works for me. My enthusiasm for chant began when I was in high school and my parents gave me a recording of a Gregorian Christmas Mass. In 1993, I had the good fortune of finding a Gregorian chant *schola* in New York City. (*Schola* is the Latin word for "school." *Schola cantorum*, or "school of singers," refers to any group that sings only Gregorian chant.)

This *schola*, which practices chant as a form of contemplative prayer, has located itself in various Episcopal churches. Having now sung chant as a contemplative exercise for four years, I can say that what I had found in my Christmas Mass recording was a state of mind, the key to which is attentive listening.

Chant is an ensemble effort. Because we do not have a conductor in our *schola*, we can stay together only if we listen to each other very closely. With its minute variations of tempo and virtually endless combinations of pitch, value and tune, chant brings our attention to bear out of a divided state.

Most Tuesdays when I leave work I am not especially eager to spend the evening chanting. The marvelous thing is that this doesn't matter. If I commit myself to paying attention, the rest takes care of itself. The tension between making it happen and letting it happen is at the core of chant. Chant, specifically, and contemplative prayer, generally, bring us into the realm of opposites, the dilemma of immortal souls inhabiting mortal bodies, of a world at once fallen and redeemed. Contemplation is one way of mediating these dilemmas.

We have learned from our experience in the *schola* that chant will take care of itself only if we give it full attention and adequate time. If we are either impatient or lazy we produce no more than an evening of notably boring music. Just as chant sets its own pace, so the contempla-

tive life itself results in heightened awareness of the pace of creation — the weather, the seasons, the cycle of day and night. These cycles give order to the daily monastic offices and to the liturgical calendar.

My first response to chant was one of late-20th-century impatience. Over time I have come to enjoy an activity that I can not rush by installing more bytes of memory or depressing the accelerator. We can rush when we speak, but not when we listen.

The practice of contemplative prayer embodied in Gregorian chant does not require flight into the desert or severe austerity. What we have tried to do in our *schola* is bring aspects of this practice forward through the millennia, into our hurried lay lives. With consistent practice, this is entirely possible. The world opens its arms when we allow for silence and listen. **TW**

Bill Jordan works in the National Ministries Unit of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. in New York, N.Y.

Tables and chairs, continued from page 6

Their big houses on Beacon Street?
Their jobs? The very air they breathed?

And the music goes round and round.
When the Italians settled in the North End, the Irish moved away, displaced, they said, by these infamous newcomers. The Jews, the Blacks, the Poles, Lithuanians, the Chinese, the whole city of Boston, from the North End to Blue-Hill Avenue, to the south shore suburbs and to the west, everybody running with the rigor of a group of children playing musical chairs, every one imagining the residence of a capricious maestro in the sky who at any moment would stop the music and slip

away a chair.

And now, reminded of my mother's struggle before me, I too search for my place at the table. I am willing to give up my seat, but I don't know where I belong, to whom I am important, by whom I am needed. I wonder where my place is in the lives of my children. No longer do they confide in me, ask my advice. I can no longer heal their wounds. I am overcome at times with a deep sense of loss. I am left standing as the music continues to play, the music of their lives, and I feel sometimes that my chair has been removed. I am afraid. **TW**

A promise kept

by Rosanna Kazanjian

***La Promesse* (1997), directed by Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. Starring Jeremie Renier, Olivier Gourmet. In French with subtitles.**

It is hard to understand real oppression unless one has lived that particular reality. Somehow, in viewing *La Promesse*, I had no choice but to allow the waves of truth wash over my ignorance.

A 1997 film produced and directed by the Dardenne brothers, *La Promesse* shows the marks of the directors' 20 years of documentary film work. It is a starkly realistic, intensely moving film. It has a black-and-white quality in a technicolor format.

Set in Belgium, the story revolves around a 15-year-old boy, Igor, who learns to be a small-time hustler from his father, Roger. Together they toil in the town's only growth industry — the exploitation of illegal immigrants. Igor meets a majestic African woman who, with her baby, has left her village to join her husband. In this encounter Igor's uneasy attachment to his father's values and life-style begins to unravel. Roger draws his son into a cover-up of the accidental death of the woman's husband and a plan to sell the unsuspecting wife into prostitution. Igor, who has promised the dying man to look after the widow and child, begins his journey of liberation from his father's possessive, self-directed love toward a moral awakening.

A central image of the film is the

Rosanna Kazanjian is an Episcopal priest who, with two colleagues, runs a retreat center for women in Tenants Harbor, Maine, called Greenfire.

mother and child. There is a scene of transport trailers, full of new cars, parked in a railroad yard. As Igor and his father arrive on the scene, people begin to emerge from the cars, illegal immigrants waiting for the pick-up. From the very top of the rig a tall, stately African woman steps down carrying her baby. No manger was more humble. This black Madonna and child step into a world poised to receive

This is a film about creating family, creating tribe and attempting to do this inside structures that tend to disassemble rather than connect.

them with disrespect and dismissal.

Asseta Ouedrogo, who plays the role of the mother, brings to the film a strength which conveys unshakable values — values firmly rooted in the culture she has left. In unlikely settings, from dingy rooms to alleys, she recreates rituals that hold her family's soul journey in this strange land. The space around her becomes grounded because she is grounded. As a homeless woman she creates home space. Igor grasps this with his gut and chooses to respond to her over his own flesh and blood.

Each role in this film is played with compelling realism, but Ouedrogo's acting is entirely convincing. She has an interesting way of never quite facing the camera, a predilection which after a while conveys a sense of self-possession. She never quite gives herself to us, and fi-

nally, one can't help but honor her wisdom — as, ultimately, does Igor.

The relationship between the father and son reflects the complexity and confusion of love and need. Igor is at times an age-appropriate boy hanging out with his buddies, working on a hot-rod bike. At other times he is a wise, deeply compassionate young man struggling to be an independent thinker.

This is a film about creating family, creating tribe and attempting to do this inside structures that tend to disassemble rather than connect. It is about the longing of the human heart, no matter how ill prepared, and no matter how unsupported, to create home, family, spaces that hold.

In the first moments of the film, as the immigrants' wildly idealistic hope for a better life encounters squalor, manipulation and grinding hardship, I wondered if this was going to be one of those nihilistic films of unredeemed pain and suffering. One of my rules for a good film experience is that it convey some redemption, some reflection of possible goodness even in such circumstances. *La Promesse* is a promise kept. There is a strength that emerges through the aura of tension and fear that left me deeply moved and hopeful.

This film does not have a fairy story ending. It is a glimpse of the possibility and vitality of the human spirit in the midst of raw, cruel, struggling life. It weaves its way through the reality of the powerlessness and homelessness of displaced people, picking up threads of human connectedness and compassion. This is a strong film that lingers in the mind and heart.

TW

review

Sometimes the most telling signs of who has power and who does not can be found in what David Ota calls “the petty stuff.” Ota is a Japanese-American priest who serves as rector of a mostly Anglo-white Episcopal parish in northern California. Trying to balance out the mix between dominant and minority cultures is an enormous task with progress measured in the tiniest of leaps. For when you are on the “fringe,” as Ota describes minorities in the church, even the smallest details give a measure of powerlessness that the majority do not see.

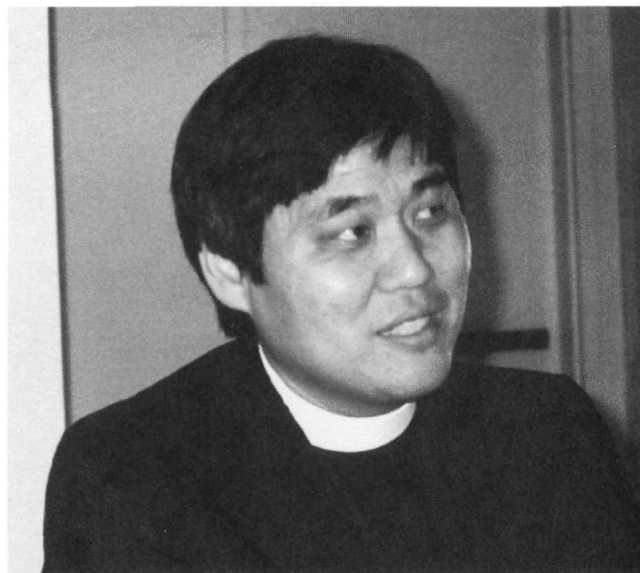
Take food, for instance.

“Now I know this will sound petty, but we were planning a stewardship dinner for the vestry and we started talking about what food to serve,” said Ota, 43, rector of St. Ambrose Episcopal Church in Foster City, a suburb of San Francisco. Approximately 90 percent of the congregation is Caucasian.

“We started talking about having Chinese food. And this one guy said, ‘Our people don’t like that.’ And I’m sitting right there. It’s like, who is ‘our people’? When somebody else suggested having spaghetti the guy said that’s what our people would like to have. I had to smile and chuckle, but at the same time I’m thinking of how people use language in ways that divide us.

“Then at the celebration service for my induction as rector, the plan was to serve food but I noticed there was no rice on the menu — no rice!” Ota says. “My

“It is only when you are in day-to-day contact through ministry and service with minority people that you begin to discover what they have to offer.”



David Ota

Paying attention to the ‘petty stuff’ by Kate DeSmet

home congregation, which is Japanese-American, was planning on attending. And while Foster City is an area that is mostly Anglo, 25 percent of the population is Japanese. So we ordered rice.”

Ota’s ministry in a mostly Caucasian parish is new ground for him. He arrived at St. Ambrose with his wife Karen Swanson, an Episcopal priest, and their 6 1/2-year-old son in September 1997. Previously he was rector of Good Samaritan parish in Honolulu, Hawaii for 14 years, where 70 percent of the membership is Japanese. There were also large numbers of Chinese, Hawaiians, and Koreans.

Ota is a third-generation Japanese American whose father was interned in a U.S. prison camp during the Second World War. His mother was born in Nevada but spent her girlhood in Japan during the war. His mother’s family are Buddhists, but when she came to the U.S. seeking work as a cleaning lady, she

joined the Reformed Church — in part, to learn English. Ota’s father started attending an Episcopal church as a young man because the local parish offered youth activities. His father’s two brothers became Episcopal priests.

Ota was ordained into the Episcopal priesthood after studying at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, Calif. He is a strong supporter of formal seminary training — but with a caveat: The third year should be devoted to immersion in a parish experience with minorities and immigrants.

“You need to learn the language and style of the people instead of imposing western theological concepts on them,” Ota said. “You can’t learn what minority cultures can teach by going to seminary. It is only when you are in day-to-day contact through ministry and service with them that you begin to discover what they have to offer. You begin to see that the

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

Kate DeSmet is a locked-out *Detroit News* religion reporter.

way the world works for them is not necessarily the same as it does for the dominant culture.”

One example: Ota says many Asians are offended by the routine use of Roberts’ Rules of Order during church meetings. The rules govern when persons can speak, how they vote, and who can make final decisions.

“In western culture and in the way the church operates there is an assumption that we must use Roberts’ Rules of Order,” Ota said. “It is one way of conducting corporate meetings, and it is a very western model. It is not an Asian model, and it isn’t a Native American model. In the Asian community we decide things more by consensus. Roberts’ Rules are very confrontational. The dominant assumption that we all make decisions this way is off-putting.”

When Ota served as head of the diocese’s department of Congregational Development, he decided to change the way meetings were run when the department met with financially distressed congregations.

“There would be two tables facing each other — one would be the department leaders, the other would be the congregation leaders who needed money. So it was divisive and adversarial from the start,” Ota said. “They would come to us and it would look as if they were begging for money. So I changed the process. We began meeting in a circle. And everybody got to hear what everybody else was saying. And everybody got to ask questions of anyone else. It was no longer where just the finance director could ask the questions or something like that. I added a spiritual component as well, with some scripture reading and prayer. I think what we did was take from the women’s model of the circle, and the Asian model of consensus. And it worked.”

Ota said the church must also change

the way it selects leaders if it hopes to include diverse cultures. For instance, Asians often do not feel comfortable volunteering to take on leadership roles. They view that sort of behavior as “uppity,” Ota said.

“In Hawaii we had an Asian minority group that met and discussed these things and we asked the question, ‘Who would be good to serve on the diocesan council?’ Once we came up with some names we’d personally encourage those people to serve. But if those same people had put themselves forward they’d be seen as uppity by other members of the community. If the church doesn’t understand the culture it just misses out. The church has lost lots of able and competent people because we haven’t sought them out.”

In particular, Ota said the church has failed to develop a comprehensive strategy for evangelizing the large numbers of Indochinese immigrants in the U.S. — including Vietnamese, Laotians, Hmong and Cambodians. He has worked with Duke Ngyun, the first Vietnamese Episcopal priest ordained in this country. Ngyun had been working with Vietnamese young people in an immigrant resettlement program associated with St. Anselm’s in Garden Grove, Calif. — the only Vietnamese Episcopal church in the U.S.

“He helped these kids find meaning and a connection that was wonderful,” Ota said. “But once these kids went off to college they were completely lost because there are no other Vietnamese Episcopal churches anywhere else. So they joined other churches. I don’t think the Episcopal Church has made a decision to evangelize the Indochinese immigrants. We help them to resettle out of a Christian commitment to serve. But we have to be intentional about bringing them into the larger, wider church.”

Ota found a profound opportunity for evangelizing the Asian community in

Hawaii whenever events dealt with the death of a loved one. Reverence for the dead, particularly family ancestors, is deeply tied to the Asian culture. One of the most widely celebrated Buddhist festivals is the *O Bon*, in which honor and respect are paid to the dead in street demonstrations, dancing and festive ceremonies. So when the church calendar marked All Souls, Ota made sure worshippers understood that the day commemorated all souls — not just Christian ones. “You lift up whomever you love,” Ota said.

Ota sees the priest’s role as that of “seminary dean” — helping educate and train members for service and ministry. In his new parish, Ota said a major challenge will be lifting the veil of invisibility that surrounds the small number of minority and immigrant families in the parish. He has already noticed how, during services, they often sit away from the main congregation, off to the side or in the back. So he will begin inviting them to take on more visible roles in the church’s celebrations. He wants to pull them into the center, away from the fringe. It is the philosophy that guides his life.

“It is a gospel value to notice people on the fringe. We have to lift them up, and that helps the dominant people notice them and rethink their assumptions,” Ota said. “It brings the fringe into the center and it changes the mix. You know most of the action in the church happens on the fringe, and the center is where people are most concerned about keeping the *status quo*, keeping things the way they are.

“But we’ve got to make change, not so much in people as in the process of how we do things. And when you change the process you give more people more power. The old idea that the only people with power are in the hierarchy is an old model and not a good way to have a relationship. If we can change the old models we will be better off.”

TW

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