

AN APPEAL FROM A LOCAL ADVOCATE

Presented by Lisa Catalfamo-Flores at a forum on "The Faces of Immigration," Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Glens Falls, May 19, 2017.

It is imperative that we move past *political rhetoric* and work *collectively* to create an immigration and guest worker policy that not only addresses the increasingly complex needs of our diverse economy, but also reflects the values so central to this American democracy, most foundationally a respect for basic human rights and freedom. In short, we need a visa system that works and also upholds our values. Currently, we have neither.

We citizens have been careless in allowing our representatives to continue with the laziest means of garnering our votes - the vilification of a non-enemy, in this case, the working immigrant. In so doing, these representatives need only to posture against this ghost threat with exclusionary border walls or strongarm deportation tactics to win our support. In ceding to the false reality of this fictional enemy, we not only 1) let our insecurities undermine the endurance of central American values, but also 2) allow our representatives to ignore genuine needs of our communities, and play act instead for their own re-election votes.

The truth of the matter is that immigrant workers have been critical to our economy, responding to the needs of employers in the lowest wage category as well as the most technologically specialized categories. And yet with an ever-changing and opaque visa process, subject to the whims of political saliency, these same immigrants have surrendered their rights to personal safety, freedom and dignity. They have been unable to establish themselves or to plan for their futures. And they and their families have been held hostage to this fictionalized wall - on both sides.

We must do the American thing - the moral and courageous thing - and work to guide these workers out of the shadows, and help provide them opportunity to build lives on their own merit.

The current immigration system is seriously flawed - not having been overhauled significantly since the 1960s. It is deficient in important ways - failing to allow for any reasonable path for employees in attaining citizenship or security, as well as failing to afford employers the means to conduct business though dependent upon this substantial labor force. These inadequate policies wreak havoc on individual lives and growth of business - disallowing for things as simple as a drive to the grocery store.

And yet as the policy stands, we allocate precious public resources directing law enforcement to police immigrants on these grocery store trips instead of attending to genuine public safety threats. Did you know that immigrants are significantly underrepresented in the criminal sector by average? The criminal immigrant is yet another myth created by the lazy political seeking the un-earned vote.

Enough of the lazy politicians. Band-aid reforms serve only political re-elections, not the needs of our immigrant workers or the businesses who depend on their employ to succeed. This fictionalized war on immigrants cannot be tolerated any longer. The only true divide that persists is the one constructed by our elected officials between her easy

vote and her doing more difficult, but what is right - and addressing the complexities of integrating an immigrant worker into civil society to the benefit of the individual, our economy and our American integrity.

We demand our elected officials work to reform Immigration Policy.

- A policy that allows for people living in this country to remain and establish legal status without leaving
- A policy that allows businesses to hire workers based on need
- Comprehensive reform based on data (not politics, rhetoric, misinformation)
- We do not support a piecemeal approach, such as representatives Stefanik and Collins bill, The Family Farm Bill Relief Act -which only serves to put a bandaid on a broken system and not address the larger issue
- We do not agree with the President's Executive Order on Immigration which states, "Section 5 expands the priority list of noncitizens subject to deportation to anyone charged of a criminal offense, who committed acts that constitute a criminal offense, who engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation, who has abused any program related to public benefits, who is subject to a final order of removal, but has not departed, or who otherwise poses a risk to public safety."
- We do not want our money spent on a border wall or the construction of detention facilities, as is also stated in the President's Executive Order on Immigration

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