

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS



A Christmas DREAM for Students Around the Country

Author: Andrea Pascual

December 23rd 2010

As the holidays draws near, bright lights decorate the streets of the District of Columbia, carols are sung, cookies are baked by the dozen and stores fill up with anxious shoppers hoping to find the perfect gift. All this excitement is driven by the magic of Christmas and, more importantly, the anticipation of traveling home to be reunited with family members and celebrate the birth of the son of God.

However, this perfect Christmas picture is distorted as I remember that many families will not be reunited this Christmas. Hard-working, honest people of faith are left to celebrate in fear and isolation because of our immigration policies.

On Tuesday, December, 14th 2010 I joined with faith leaders and DREAM Act students from around the nation, as well as our DC based faith advocates to urge the Senate to adopt the DREAM Act. Together we prayerfully marched around the three Senate buildings replicating what Joshua had done in the Hebrew Scriptures to bring down the walls of Jericho. Our group was attempting to bring down the walls that some conservative Senators have put up against the DREAM Act.

When the march ended, the DREAM students gathered in a circle as the rest of us surrounded them and prayed that the Senate would open their hearts and grant new opportunities to these students. At one point I looked up to see one of the students with tears rolling down her cheeks and her eyes squeezed shut. Her hands gripped tightly to the students next to her and I could feel the passion in her prayers. The anger I've had at the lack of concern towards our immigration policies intensified at the moment.

How can a majority of Senators who are people of faith too, not support a piece of legislation that displays one of the core values of our faith - love? Particularly with the Christmas spirit all around, where love and compassion permeate our lives, how can people exclude the DREAM students from the opportunities that the American dream promises?

“The command to love the stranger is a consistent theme throughout Scripture and occurs nearly three dozen times in the first five books of the Bible. In the Hebrew Scriptures, it is surpassed in its frequency only by the command to adore, love and revere God and God alone” (Cardinal Roger Mahoney, October 1993 Sermon)

One of Catholic social teaching's basic principles is the affirmation of life and human dignity, which extends to all people. People have the right to migrate to maintain a certain quality of life for themselves and for their families. Biblical Christian teaching has encouraged the acceptance and sharing of love for all people, from all circumstances. In fact, the spirit of Christmas is one of inclusion and generosity and it is during this time that the importance of the DREAM Act is most evident. We need to make sure that we have room in the Inn.

I pray and continue to advocate so that the Senate will reform our immigration system and help to reunite families, not tear them apart.



DREAM Act only hope for college for local immigrant

Author: PICO

July 9th 2010

Walking down North High Street in West Chester, she doesn't appear to be different than any other 21-year-old. However, what separates her from others walking down the street is not her appearance.

Sophia, who requested that her real name not be used due to her status, is one of over 11 million undocumented immigrants living in America.

Her father was already working in the U.S. when he decided he wanted to bring his family here when she was 3. However, the immigration process takes between eight to 12 years to complete and there is no guarantee of obtaining legal residency after this period.

For Sophia's father, it wasn't worth sacrificing his children's childhood to wait for the immigration process. He decided to rely on coyotes, who are paid thousands per person to smuggle people into the U.S. from Mexico, to reunite his family.

The coyotes bought the family across the border. From there, they made their way from Las Vegas to Chicago before being united with family in West Chester.

"First, we lived with family that was already here legally," Sophia said. "We tried to save money for a place of our own."

Settling in American culture, her mother was hired at Parkway Cleaners. After several months, her family saved enough to rent their own apartment. Sophia lived just like any other legal resident but her world would be flip upside down a few years later.

When Sophia was seven, officers from the Immigration Customs and Enforcement Agency raided her mother's workplace and took her to a prison facility outside of Philadelphia.

Sophia's mother told her that "if you did speak back to them [the officers] or try to argue with you, at that time, they did hit you."

"My aunt back-talked to them. She asked them 'Why are you taking us? I have children, they need us,' At that point, one of the ICE officers punched her and pushed her to the floor." Sophia said. "She fell to the floor, she was scraped and beaten."

After the incident happened to her, Sophia's aunt took the case to court and was able to obtain her citizenship.

"I had no idea what was going on. All I knew was that she wasn't there," Sophia said. "I remember going to school and I just felt so sad. I wanted to cry right there."

Without any contact from Sophia's mother for months, her father slipped into a deep depression and began drinking daily. Members of her extended family began to take care of his children. With finances now tightened, Sophia and her sister would often do odd jobs like cleaning houses for just \$20 a day.

Yet within a few weeks, her mother re-entered the United States undocumented.

"When she came back we were all sleeping. She walked in through the door and my sister ran down and started crying," Sophia said. "My mother said 'I'm back, but you have to get up and get ready for school. You have to go.' My sister then said, 'But if I go to school you won't come back again.'"

Her mother decided not to return to work due to the threat of deportation. Soon afterwards, Sophia and her siblings were able to obtain a sponsorship from her uncle for legal residency. Sophia went on to graduate high school with honors.

She applied to become a citizen, but for years her application was unaddressed. When she turned 21, it expired.

“I’m out of that application and there’s nothing I can do. The only hope that I would have is the DREAM Act,” Sophia said.

Under the DREAM Act, students who have lived in the United States for at least five years and have demonstrated good moral behavior would be able apply for six years of conditional status.

During this six year period, a person must complete two years of a four-year degree or serve in the military for two years. After this period, depending on the moral conduct of the applicant, legal residency would be granted.

Without conditional status, Sophia cannot pursue post-secondary education.

“Something that I think would really help people is if I would be able to do communications with Spanish and be an official translator,” Sophia said. “But it feels horrible, it’s like I’m lying here to my teachers telling them I don’t want to go to college. But I do, I still do.”

Sophia is not the only one. 65,000 students who graduate high school and have been in the U.S. more than five years face limited prospects for completing their education or working legally in the United States due to lack of documentation, according to the National Immigration Law Center.

While 118 representatives and 36 senators have co-sponsored the bill it still has not been brought to the floor for debate.

“Not everyone is here as a criminal or, you know, to steal anyone’s job. People just want to come here for a better future for themselves, for their families, for their kids,” Sophia said. “I think that a lot of students and people here are proving to this country that they are an asset and that they want to belong here, they learn English wanting to belong here.”

Despite her hardships, Sophia does not regret her family’s decision to come here undocumented.

“I said to my mom, ‘I’m glad you guys made the decision to be here, otherwise we wouldn’t have had the future we have now,’” Sophia said. “I feel very lucky. I feel so blessed. Obviously someone wants me here. Obviously I’m here for a reason.”

Update – At the end of 2010 the DREAM Act was approved in the House but ultimately lost because it was a few votes short of the 60 needed votes in the Senate. Students are still hoping to reintroduce the Dream Act in the years ahead.

What Would the "Deserving" Affluent Look Like?
Author: Bill Mefford
December 2010

As Congress finally put the finishing touches on an unpredictably busy lame duck session on this past Wednesday, and as President Obama took his victory lap, gloating not only over the last few weeks but over the last two years in what is being called one of the most accomplished Congressional sessions in history, I still feel very let down this Christmas.

Why dare I stray from the liberal talking point of boasting of the legislative accomplishments of the Obama administration? Because even with the flurry of activity, this administration and this Congress has often failed to bring necessary relief for the most vulnerable and defenseless in our society.

In Jefferson Cowie's excellent book, "Stayin' Alive: the 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class" Cowie asserts that in the 1970s there was a dramatic shift in the political focus that helped bring the Republicans into power under Ronald Reagan, and caused the Democrats to shift their focus as well under Clinton that continues under Obama. And that shift, to be brief, occurred with a focus away from the poor and marginalized groups and toward the welfare of the middle class.

Democrats, in their efforts to regain power from the Republicans (who had shifted themselves in the 1970s to cultural issues as they recognized their views on the economy did not benefit most of the middle class), began to talk less about poverty and about those on society's margins, and instead, focused on the "needs" of the middle class. In other words, the Republicans established the playing field of the debates between the two parties and the Democrats have happily followed along (as has the Church, but that is another posting).

And so who is the loser in the power plays between the current two-party competition for attention to the middle class? The poor and marginalized.

In addition, when talk about the poor and marginalized does occasionally spring up, it is a discussion trapped in the framework of "deserving" vs. "undeserving" poor.

One perfect example of this is the debate around the DREAM Act. During the debate in both the House and Senate, numerous members of Congress (as well as those of us who advocated for its passage) who spoke in favor of the bill, often said that DREAM Act students were brought into this country "through no fault of their own." In other words, they were "deserving" poor and were inherently distinct from the "non-deserving" poor, i.e. all other undocumented immigrants.

The Church will do well to avoid these frameworks and put forward our vision that all undocumented immigrants are made in the image of God and many of them were forced to cross the border illegally, or stay past the legal time on their visas, due to economic and foreign policies of the United States. In other words, the distinction between "deserving" and "undeserving" immigrants is blurred, if not entirely invisible.

I find it utterly hypocritical that the public, and even more so, the Church, harshly insists on separating the "deserving" vulnerable from the "undeserving." And let us not ignore the fact that the requirements placed on the "deserving" poor are quite strenuous. In fact, I think a better framework would be "perfect" poor vs. "imperfect" poor.

Funny how these requirements are not made on the middle class. We do not talk about the "deserving" affluent vs. "undeserving" affluent.

But perhaps we should use these terms. What if, in the insane extension of tax cuts for the affluent (and yes, if you make even in the neighborhood of \$250,000, you are affluent!), we also established some stringent requirements so that we can distinguish between the "deserving" affluent and the "undeserving" affluent. What if, in order to receive the extended tax cuts, "deserving" affluent were those who had a member of their immediate families serving in the military. In doing so, they could receive 50% of their tax cuts. The rest of the tax cuts could be earned through a combination of:

- maintaining either a one-parent household or a stable marriage;
- holding stable employment (and changing jobs would prevent tax cuts from being received until the current job had been maintained for at least 6 consecutive months);
- those who receive tax cuts would be subject to surprise visits by social workers employed by the newly created government bureaucracy, the Earned Tax-Cut Incentive Agency (ETCIA). ETCIA workers would verify that the recipients' marriage was stable, that they were being responsible on their job and were not committing any infractions identified by their employer which would immediately stop payments on any tax-cuts, that they were not using any alcohol or non-prescription drugs, that they were participating in their community and could provide several references to support their citizenship in good standing.

We would dare not apply these standards to the affluent in this country because we assume that all affluent people are "deserving!" But yet, if you are poor, or on the margins, you are mandated to not be "deserving," but "perfect." Hypocrisy.

So, while President Obama and others celebrate the number of achievements made by the 111th Congress, I must continue to lament the frameworks used that preference the affluent and condemn the poor and marginalized. My prayer for the new year is that the Church lead the way in seeing the poor and affluent as all children of God, while joining with God's Kingdom preference for the poor.

Until then, I pray we all have a Merry Christmas.



Undocumented, Unafraid: God's Messengers in Our Time
Author: Yvette Schock
March 21st 2011

One day in Tucson last summer, as I wove a path through the crowds at a demonstration against SB1070, a young woman approached and held out to me a sign from the stack she had clasped under her arm. On the front was a brightly colored image of another young woman holding a sign that read in bold, block letters, “UNDOCUMENTED, UNAFRAID: NO TENEMOS MIEDO.” I stopped walking, seized by a moment of indecision—I am not an undocumented immigrant, and I do not have to fear the things an undocumented immigrant might, so, I wondered, what did it mean for me to carry this image and these words? Could it be a declaration of solidarity and support for families and students refusing to live in the shadows, and a denunciation of an economic system that requires the existence of an underclass and of a society and political leaders who accept it? Did it honor the courage of immigrant advocates, or was it just a shadow gesture made by someone who risked very little by showing up at a demonstration, in contrast to those who risked a great deal? My moment of indecision didn't last long; I decided not to overthink it (I'm often guilty of this), held the sign high, and joined in the chanting and singing of the crowd.

But the sign came home from Tucson with me; it sits propped against the wall opposite my desk, and I have had months to reflect on the significance of its message—how it speaks within the context of these times, and what it demands of me in particular. I have begun to read its words as the kind of defiant, hopeful, confident, David-confronting-Goliath statement of faith we hear again and again in the Psalms. In the face of all kinds of dangers and anxieties, the Psalmists often declared their trust in God and their defiance of any human who might harm them using these words, or something very like them:

In God I trust and am not afraid.

What can mere mortals do to me?

(Psalm 56:4)

It's not just the Psalmists: very, very often in Scripture, when messengers from God arrive to bring comfort, hope and challenge to people in all kinds of precarious situations, they usually begin the same way: “Do not be afraid.” Maybe it's because coming face-to-face all of a sudden with a messenger from God is a startling experience, or maybe it's because God's messengers so often appear to people with plenty of reason to be afraid, but I think it might also be because of what fear does to us. Fear causes us to shrink, to turn inward, to turn away from God and from others. When God's messengers arrive, it's usually not only to comfort and reassure, but also to challenge and move us to action. People who are shrinking in fear are in no state to hear God's promises, to joyfully dive into the powerful current of God's vision of life and abundance for our world and allow that current to redirect their lives, to answer God's call to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

And so, when God's messengers appear in the stories of our faith, they send up a flare for us: they prepare their listeners (and us, the readers) to hear and receive the promise and challenge that is coming next by reminding them (and us): Do not be afraid. God appears to Abram, elderly and childless, and declares: “Do not be afraid...Look up at the sky and count the



stars...so shall your offspring be” (Genesis 15). When Abram’s wife, Sarai, sends her slave, Hagar and her son (by Abram) into the desert to die, God hears their cries and promises: “Hagar, do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” (Genesis 21) God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, saying to the Hebrew people in exile, “Do not be **afraid**, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west” (Isaiah 43:5). The angel Gabriel appears to Mary to declare, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.” (Luke 1:30-32)

Fear, it seems, has no part in God’s vision of justice and wholeness for our world, nor in God’s way of working in the world. But fear has it uses for those who would wield it as their tool—human history is littered with far too many stories about political leaders stirring up fear of a particular group of people to distract from a problem the leader may not be able to address, to disguise their own shortcomings or corruption, to maintain their positions of power. Perhaps this is another reason why “Do not be afraid” is the refrain that begins each telling of God’s promises—to point out the universe of difference between God’s order and the order of empires.

Our society is no exception. It is crowded with voices that aim to stir up fear in immigrant and non-immigrant communities alike—candidates for public office, governors, state representatives, county sheriffs and Members of Congress who do not hesitate to paint immigrants in our communities as enemies, criminals, threats to our country’s security and to our families’ well-being; sponsors of state legislation that aims to make life difficult for undocumented immigrants. ICE agents waiting outside of apartment buildings or trolling in grocery store parking lots, increasing numbers of deportations that begin with a routine traffic stop, the threat of immigrant parents being separated from U.S. citizen children—all of these policies and practices are stirring up fear within immigrant communities, and for some, stirring up fear is the point. Though I don’t think the Obama administration would admit this, current immigration enforcement policy, in the absence of immigration reform, is, in effect, a program of attrition through enforcement—a strategy that banks on creating fear and suffering in immigration communities.

And yet some in those very communities are refusing to turn inward, to shrink in fear. I don’t know when the phrase “Undocumented and unafraid” first came into use in the movement for just immigration reform, but one account points to youth leaders working to pass the DREAM Act as the source, which wouldn’t surprise me. A number of DREAM students walked from Florida to Washington, DC early last year, declaring all the way that they were undocumented and unafraid. I imagine them walking through counties with 287g agreements in operation, and meeting with unsympathetic law enforcement officials or Members of Congress, living the words of the Psalmists:

***In God I trust and am not afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?***

They refused to give power to fear, refused to be turned inward, away from their families, their communities, or God.



Perhaps these are messengers from God in our time—they do not come to us encouraging us “Do not be afraid”, but challenge us through their example, their declaration that they are unafraid.

I haven’t answered all of my own questions about the poster from the Tucson demonstration, but I have come to see it as a kind of icon—a living image that reaches out of its frame, grabs my hand, and points me to pay attention to these messengers of our time, to follow the path of the migrant Christ: the One who walks with DREAM students on the way to Washington, D.C., who lives inside apartment buildings where ICE agents wait outside, who sits with school children as they wait for their parents to come home from work, half afraid that they might not arrive; the One who calls us to reject a life shadowed by fear and to seek justice for all people

Out of the Shadows and Into the Light: Dream Movement Declares We are “Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic!”

Author: Stephen Pavey

“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore.”

– Cesar Chavez

What do the teachings of Jesus have to say “to those who stand with their backs against the wall?” asked Howard Thurman when addressing the African American experience of racism and violence of the 1940s. His answer and challenge, in his *Jesus and the Disinherited*, shaped the civil rights movement. The good news revealed in the teachings and life of Jesus is “that fear, deception, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them.” Jesus reveals the power of love, for self and others, that enables us to overcome relations of inequality that are perpetuated by fear, deception, and hate.

Fast forward 60 years to today’s growing nativism, xenophobia, and violence surrounding the presence of immigrants in the United States, and Thurman’s analysis of the lives of the disinherited is equally compelling here and now to those who have their backs against the wall. The experience of inequality and violence among immigrants is exacerbated for the 11.8 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. Nearly 20 years ago anthropologist Leo Chavez described the “shadowed lives” of undocumented immigrants. With the growing public antipathy and the media construction of the “Latino threat,” living in the shadows remains an apt description and continues to be marked by the same fears and survival techniques of deception described by Thurman.

A segment of this vulnerable undocumented population has been called the “1.5 generation” because they immigrated to the US as children, usually brought by their parents. An estimated 2.1 million undocumented students are enrolled in the nation’s public school system, and over 65,000 graduate from American high schools each year. Although guaranteed free public primary and secondary education by the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* in 1982, these students today face the contradiction of limited opportunities for tertiary education and social mobility in a country that for all intents and purposes is the only home they know. It is not surprising that most feel what Paulo Freire described as “hope pulverized in the immobility of the crushing present, some sort of final stop beyond which nothing is possible.”

In the face of uncertain futures, of dreams deferred, and of the shame carried by living in the shadows, undocumented youth are coming out of the shadows and publicly announcing, “My name is _____, and I’m undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic.” The undocumented immigrant youth-led movement is gaining momentum by bringing their personal stories out into the light through grassroots organizing and activism, including sit-ins, vigils, hunger strikes, marches, rallies, and acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. Hope is alive, but the numbers reveal that many more undocumented students still remain in the shadows. These numbers are growing every year.

What can be done? We must insist that the federal government get to work on humane comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path toward citizenship for these dreamers. In response to the federal government’s inability to work on immigration reform, states are introducing a record number of largely punitive and anti-immigrant bills, including 1070

copycats, student bans, and challenges to the 14th amendment's birthright citizenship. We must insist that both state and federal governments end their punitive, enforcement-only approach to immigration reform.

In the meantime, the growing anti-immigrant culture and corresponding public policies continue to damage and divide our communities as well tear apart families.

We should be reminded of the example of Saul, in Acts chapter nine, who was brought to his knees by a great light on the road to Damascus. Out of the light he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." We need a similar conversion moment. Paul's radical conversion embodied a transformation from the persecutor to the persecuted, from siding with the powerful to walking with the oppressed. This radical conversion from hate to love for us, the privileged and powerful, will find Jesus among the disinherited undocumented immigrant in our midst. We must repent of our anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy and seek a conversion of our broken immigration system that persecutes Jesus in the midst of the vulnerable undocumented immigrant community. Only the great light of love can convert the powerful and privileged from hate and oppression while at the same time that we walk with our marginalized brothers and sisters who experience the same light in their conversion from fear and deception to love. Let us repent, for The Kingdom of God is near!

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Connecticut Dreamers – A Reflection

Author: Right Reverend James E. Curry Bishop Suffragan of Connecticut

Last week I attended the signing ceremony for Connecticut's new In-State Tuition bill. This bill gives every young adult who has attended a Connecticut high school for four years and has graduated access to in-state tuition for all Connecticut public colleges and universities regardless of immigration status. In Connecticut that can mean a savings of up to \$17,000 a year. Even as the Lieutenant Governor welcomed people to the ceremony she commented that this was a controversial law. Debate had been lengthy and contentious in both the House and the Senate. Even as the vote was taken, it was unclear that the bill would pass.

Surrounding Governor Dan Malloy, as he signed the bill into law, were a group of young adults, the Connecticut Dreamers, who deserve much of the credit for the passage of the bill. These young adults began to organize themselves through Facebook about a year ago. They had three things in common. They had lived in Connecticut most of their lives, they wanted to be active and productive members of society, and they were undocumented. Together they began to tell their stories. They began to speak out knowing that as they identified themselves they risked deportation. They are people of great courage, conviction, and a desire to make life better.

Maria Praeli is a Dreamer. She has just turned eighteen and is a rising senior at New Milford High School. Maria came to the United States with her parents from Peru when she was five and has attended New Milford schools for 11 years. She is a student leader, a successful student, and an articulate speaker. I first heard her speak five months ago. She told her story at a rally in support of the In State Tuition Bill. She told how she only learned that she was undocumented when her parents told her she couldn't get a driver's license. Until then she was just like every one of her classmates – a teenager dreaming about her future and doing her best to succeed. But her immigration status has changed her possibilities. As her friends began to look at colleges, she began to know that her horizons were limited by her immigration status. She couldn't afford college at out of state rates and she couldn't work without a Green Card. She decided to speak out for her own future and for the future of other undocumented kids in Connecticut. Her testimony and the testimony of other dreamers had a huge impact on the passage of the bill. Last Thursday at the signing ceremony, she spoke on behalf of all the Dreamers as she thanked the Governor and legislative leaders for their support and began to look beyond high school to college and her future with new hope.

A member of the press asked me why the Episcopal Church supported the Dreamers. I responded with some thoughts about how we stand for hospitality to the stranger, that we seek to break down barriers between people, that our faith calls us to offer hope to the oppressed and to strive for justice. But even as I said those good words, I realized that they were somewhat lifeless. We support the Dreamers because they have a claim on our humanity. Their situation is unfair and it can be changed. When I think about Maria and other undocumented kids, I know this: the Dreamers are our children. It is as simple as that. They are part of our churches and members of our society. They have dreams and fears, hopes and frustrations, skills and weaknesses the same as my own biological children do. They are part of my present and my future. With the passage of the Connecticut legislation they have one less obstacle in their pathway.



The Connecticut legislation which puts documented and undocumented students on an equal footing for affordable public higher education is a tremendously important accomplishment, but it is only a first step. The Dream Act can do what no one state by itself can do: provide a process by which young adults can seek US citizenship. Maria and her friends have spoken out boldly and articulately. They already are bringing their energy to our national debate. As we seek to organize the churches for advocacy for the Dream Act, they can be our leaders and we can be their allies.



Would I Risk as Much as the Dreamers?

Author: Lonnie Ellis

June 30, 2011

<http://bit.ly/pmvT3r>

The youngest person in a crowd of teenagers and young adults at the Dream Act Senate Judiciary Subcommittee hearing on Tuesday was an 8-year-old girl. She was adorable with a huge grin on her face as she stood next to Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) at a reception after the hearing.

The Dream Act, first introduced 10 years ago, would provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented young people who meet very specific criteria. In order to be eligible, these young immigrants must have arrived in the United States as minors, graduate from U.S. high schools, fulfill good moral character requirements, and complete two years in the military or at a four-year college. The Dream Act passed in the U.S. House of Representatives in December, 2010, but fell to a filibuster in the Senate and has now been reintroduced and given a committee hearing by Sen. Durbin.

In our current immigration system, children and young adults just like the 8-year-old smiling Latina are often denied an affordable education and sent on a path of marginalized work, social isolation, or even deportation. The Dream Act presents a chance for them to realize a full life here in the American community.

Ola Kaso, an 18-year-old born in Albania who has lived in the U.S. since she was 5, spoke very eloquently about her love of America and her energetic volunteerism. She said that although her family has done everything according to the law, there is no way under current law for her to obtain citizenship, and she is set to be deported in less than one year. Ola just graduated from high school with a 4.4 GPA and has enrolled at the University of Michigan on a scholarship to study pre-med. Asked about her career goals she said she wanted to be a surgical oncologist.

“I want to remove cancer tumors,” she said, “especially for those who cannot afford good care.” What reasoning would demand that we deport this young woman? (You can watch Ola’s testimony here beginning at the 122:24 mark.) Imagine the reaction of young people facing deportation from their families to a country they might not even remember: “Why do they want to send me away? And where? Where do they want to send me?”

The witness of these young people shows us what we ought to do politically, and challenges us to re-envision ourselves as a nation. And beyond that bigger picture, they inspire me personally and spiritually. As I watched these bold testifiers who risk deportation, I found myself asking: What is the biggest risk that I have taken for justice? No analyst thinks the Dream Act will pass anytime soon, and yet these kids are witnessing with their lives to inspire change. How can I surrender more fully to God in order to risk more of myself?

The 8-year-old girl stood smiling at the podium at the side of a U.S. senator, knowing that she was a part of something big. I too want to risk myself, with a smile on my face, and fully trust that I am a part of God’s plan for justice.



How Friends, Facebook, and Prayer Stopped the Deportation of Bernard Pastor

Author: Jeannie Choi

July 6, 2011

<http://bit.ly/qrGik4>

In November 2009, Bernard Pastor, an 18-year-old undocumented student in Ohio, was stopped by police for a minor traffic violation and detained. ICE held Pastor in federal detention with plans to deport him to his native Guatemala, though his parents had left Guatemala with Pastor when he was 3 years old. When Pastor's friends discovered that he was in detention, they created a Facebook page titled "Free Bernard Pastor."

"That page became a catalyst for information, and the local media started getting involved as that Facebook page blew up," says Troy Jackson, senior pastor at University Christian Church in Cincinnati and a local community organizer. As soon as Jackson heard Pastor's story, he also created a simple website, PrayForBernard.com. The local faith community and Pastor's classmates added to the content on both sites, and eventually Pastor's story was picked up by local and national media.

In December, friends and community members gathered in support at the Morrow County jail, where Pastor was being held, joined by the media, and soon Pastor was released from jail. While he still has a pending deportation order, Pastor's case was "moved to the bottom of the stack," Jackson says. Though the online campaign was small, with only a few hundred supporters, Jackson believes that the Facebook page and website changed the narrative in Pastor's favor. "The reality is that online social networks become a tool for organizers that help them to further the real relationships and organizing they are already doing," Jackson explains. "Bernard's classmates are 17, 18, 19 years old, but they were able to create a site that was very significant, and while the power of social change is always going to demand more than a 'like' button, I look at the Dreamers, and I see folks who are incredibly committed and use social media to grow their base, to stay connected, and to encourage one another."

Learn more about how organizers can use social media tools to motivate thousands of people to take action for justice, and watch the video about Bernard Pastor below.



An Undocumented Student's Message to Obama
Author: Gaby Pacheco
May 13, 2011

<http://bit.ly/r1hy9f>

We want actions, not words.

For nearly two decades I've called the United States of America my home. I emigrated from Ecuador with my family, grew up in Miami and attended public schools, where I was a high-achieving student who eventually made it to college. I am also an undocumented immigrant.

It was at Miami Dade College — the same institution of higher learning that President Barack Obama mentioned several times in his El Paso, Texas speech on immigration — that I gave a commencement speech to my class back in 2006. At Miami Dade, I was active not only as student government president at one of its eight campuses, but also as the Student Body Association president of the entire community college system in Florida.

I would have never been able to achieve positions of leadership were it not for the brave decision my parents made one day to come to the United States. It was an incredibly hard decision for them, as it is for anyone to leave family, language and everything they know, to take a chance at the American dream.

President Obama was correct to say the issue of immigration “often elicits strong emotions.” It's hard to understand why a family would risk so much to obtain so little. And while it's important to practice compassion, too often the rhetoric becomes hateful, as we have witnessed with the recent SB 1070 law in Arizona and its copycats in other states. Sometimes it provokes violence.

In the middle of this divisiveness, there can be hope. But only when politicians, who talk about the broken immigration system and their attempts to reform it, follow their words with actions.

Last year was a year of incomplete actions. When the DREAM Act was finally brought to debate in Congress, it fell five votes short of the 60 needed to end a Republican filibuster. The act would allow people brought into the United States as children to earn legal status by attending college or serving in the military.

We are a nation of immigrants, a nation that dreams, a nation that elects one person out of the many, the president, to guide Congress toward the changes he promised. President Obama has the executive power to stop deportations.

Today, it's a real threat to our democracy when police officials start acting like immigration officers, pushing 11 million people who already live in the shadows into greater fear. To use our resources to deport talented youth, and separate mothers and fathers from their citizen children is simply un-American.



Given the harsh political climate, immigration reform and the DREAM Act will be difficult to discuss, but we are ready to organize again.

We know President Obama supports immigration reform. We know he supports the DREAM Act. That's not in question. We need him to use his executive power to stop deportations of youths eligible for the DREAM Act, keeping families together until Congress is able to put its differences aside and acknowledge that we are part of the future of our great country.

Youth like myself are not alone in this plea. Last month, 22 Democratic senators sent a letter asking the president to use executive power to stop deportation of DREAM Act students. Just two weeks ago, the American Immigration Council released a memo by two former general counsels for the Immigration and Naturalization Service that outlined the president's authority to grant administrative relief.

He should listen, and act. We need so many people to understand our struggle and to see that we are just caught in a political limbo. We love God above all, but we also love our friends, communities, and this country.



My Hardest Working Students are Undocumented

Author: Robert Chao Romero

January 5, 2011

<http://bit.ly/nCLabW>

I am greatly saddened and angered by Congress' failure to pass the DREAM Act before Christmas last year. It is a tragic moment in the United States when justice for immigrant children is railroaded by partisan politics on the eve of Christmas. God have mercy on our country for so blatantly disregarding God's heart of compassion for immigrants in the midst of a holy season in which we are supposed to be celebrating the birth of Jesus who came to "preach the good news to the poor ... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

It is immoral to deny a university education to the children of undocumented immigrants. Although this may be a popular position within some political circles, such denial of educational opportunity is utterly unbiblical and unjust. A fundamental biblical principle is that no one should be punished for an action for which they had no control (Deuteronomy 24:16). To use a biblical analogy, if the parents eat sour grapes the children's teeth should not be set on edge (Jeremiah 31:29).

In the same way, undocumented youth should not be punished for crossing a border when they had no decision in the matter. Most undocumented youth were brought to the United States when they were just small children or infants. In fact, 65,000 such undocumented youth graduate from high school each year in the United States. Many of them are valedictorians and at the top of their class. Tragically, thousands of these students are denied a college education because of state laws which bar them from universities. Even in the few states which allow undocumented students to attend college, it is tremendously challenging for them because they are forced to pay exorbitant international student fees or refused access to public financial aid.

As a professor of ethnic studies at UCLA, I have found that some of my best students are undocumented. Although they are legally entitled to attend the university, and are able to pay in-state tuition fees (which, in California, is still a lot of money because of our sky-rocketing tuition increases), they are not allowed to receive public financial aid in the form of loans, grants, or scholarships. As a result, they often work 30 to 40 hours a week, commute 100 miles a day on public transportation, experience quasi-homelessness, sleep in their cars, and skip meals so that they can pay for their education. Moreover, for those who graduate from UCLA, their professional choices and opportunities to attend graduate school are extremely limited because of their legal status. If the DREAM Act had passed, it would have changed the lives of my students and the tens of thousands of DREAMers in the United States. They would have become entitled to receive financial aid and would have been provided with a path to citizenship and expanded professional opportunities which they so much deserve.

At this moment of personal sadness and grief over the failure of the DREAM Act to be passed, I am comforted by one thing — I know that God will bring justice for my students and the thousands of DREAMers in the United States. Jesus loves them and he promises to do this: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory." (Matthew 12:20)



The DREAM Act is Not Amnesty

Author: Andrew Simpson

December, 13, 2010

<http://bit.ly/qcluc2>

As members of Congress debate the DREAM Act once again, opponents of the act are again attacking the legislation as “backdoor amnesty.” Instead of allowing ourselves to be caught up in such broad rhetoric, we must understand that the DREAM Act is neither backdoor, nor is it amnesty.

Amnesty is defined as “a general pardon for offenses, esp. political offenses, against a government.” The Greek root of the word, *amnestia*, refers to the process of forgetting. An alternative definition of amnesty may, therefore, be “a forgetting and forgiveness of sins.” By such a definition, we can see the message of the gospel as one that grants us amnesty by Christ.

Regardless of where we differ on the benefits or demerits of amnesty, let us be thoughtful and discern enough to realize that the DREAM Act is not amnesty. Rather, it is an extension of grace to a very specific group of people who did not knowingly commit a crime against the United States.

If the DREAM Act passes this year, it would only provide a path to citizenship for those immigrants who meet a very strict set of requirements. The only immigrants who would be eligible would be those who came to the United States at the age of 15 or younger; have lived continuously in the United States since before 2005; were under the age of 30 on the date of enactment; demonstrate good moral character (i.e. prove they have not committed any crimes that would make them inadmissible to the country as determined by existing immigration law); and have graduated from high school, obtained a GED certificate, served in the military, or have been admitted to an institution of higher education in the United States.

We see from these rigorous preconditions that any person eligible for the benefits of the DREAM Act was brought to the U.S. at a young age and has been living here for years. Can we honestly, with wholehearted conviction, claim that these individuals are criminals for following their parents into the country as children? Can we look into the face of our brothers and sisters in Christ, like Gaby Pacheco, and tell them that they will be accountable for the infractions of their parents? Such an accusation is not consistent with American or Christian values.

We read in the book of Romans that we all fall short and are in need of grace in our own lives. We are offered that grace through redemption that came from Christ. How can we then turn to our neighbors who are being charged with a crime that they did not knowingly commit and refuse to extend grace? Such a judgment will render them second-class citizens for the rest of their lives.

We understand that a vote on this bill will be coming up in the Senate this week. Please call your Senator and ask them to support the DREAM Act — even if you have done so many, many times before. They need to know that you are watching and care.



My Personal Story: Parent's Migration to the United From Ireland in 1950
Author: Patrick Carolan

In 1950 my mother and father Rita and Tom Carolan stepped off the boat at Ellis Island as immigrants to America from Ireland. My mother grew up in Belfast Ireland, the oldest of eight children. Her family had very little. Her father was an alcoholic and abusive. At thirteen she had to leave school to stay home and take care of her seven younger siblings, so her mother could go to work. At 18 she went to work in a cigarette factory. She had to give most of her meager earnings to her mother to help support her brothers and sisters. My father grew up on a farm in County Cavan Ireland. He was a middle child of eight. They lived in a three room farmhouse with no electricity or plumbing. He could barely read or write. Like my mother's father my father was also an alcoholic. My mother would love to tell the story of how she stepped off the boat with one baby in her arms another in her belly and not two nickels to rub together. Sometimes I would ask my mother what possessed her to leave her siblings, her mother, her home, her friends and venture off to an unknown place with one baby and being pregnant with another and no money. She would tell me that she had hope and faith in God and a dream that her children would have a better life.

My mother had six children. Two of her children have PhD's; one has a sixth year degree and is a Director and Principal of a Magnet school. One of her children served in the Navy during the Vietnam War. One of her children is a nurse and was Supervisor of Nursing for a Hospital Cardiac unit, helping heart patients recover from surgery and lead normal lives. One of her children is an Art Therapist working with autistic children, another is a systems analyst. One of her children ran for public office and has been involved in social justice and advocacy. All of her children attended college. Three of her children have adopted other children.

My mother also had 18 grandchildren. One of whom served in the army in Afghanistan another spent two years in the Peace Corp in Peru. Four of her grandchildren were adopted, one from Pakistan and two who were previously in foster care. One of her grandchildren is a musician and performed at the Acropolis in Greece. Another is a swimmer, at fifteen she and a friend helped organize and coach a swim team for young adults with special needs. For two years they took the team to the Special Olympics. Eight of her grandchildren have graduated from college.

My mother would be one of the first to welcome new families to our neighborhood, regardless of their nationality, skin color or ethnic background. She would tell us that this is Gods land and we are all just visitors and immigrants. If we wanted God to welcome us then we had better make sure we welcomed all his children.

My mother died a few years ago. The line of people who came to pay their respects, because my mother had touched them either directly or through one of her children and grandchildren seemed to extend endlessly. Hundreds attended her funeral and many more sent their respects but due to circumstances could not attend.

I often wonder what would have happened if in 1950 when that small Irish catholic woman with barely a sixth grade education, a thick Irish accent, and without a nickel, stepped off the boat if this great nation said no you are not welcome go back to where you came from. How many lives would not have been touched? My mother was a very humble woman with a love for God and all of God's creation and a dream for her children. As a result of this one humble woman countless lives have been touched and enriched. How many Rita Carolan's are we turning away today, how many Rita Carolan's are we saying you are not welcome here, go back to where you come from.

Experiencing Captivity Reflections on Psalm 137
Author: Jeanne Roe Smith (Campus Minister)

¹ By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.

² Upon the willows in the midst of it
We hung our harps.

³ For there our captors demanded of us songs,
And our tormentors mirth, *saying*,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”

⁴ How can we sing the LORD’S song
In a foreign land?

What does it mean to be captive today? Do we recognize those who may be captives within our communities, schools, churches? Surely in our lives, in a country built on freedom and the pursuit of dreams, this kind of torment and soul rending experience of the psalmist no longer exists. Yet, there are among us, people who sit and weep on the banks of success, remembering their country of origin, and longing for acceptance in their country of residence. The children of captivity live in the shadows of fear of deportation, separation from family, and yet are expected to attend school, do well and become more like those around them, than their own family.

What do we do with the children of captivity who excel in school, against all odds and sensibilities, knock on the door of higher education and find admittance? Only to find that once again they are captive to a system that will educate them, take their money, stimulate their dreams and capacities, but in a cruel twist, ask them to sing a song of hope, yet close the door to possibilities because they do not possess the proper documents to utilize their education, intelligence and skill.

DREAMers are not asking for special treatment or access. They seek to sing their songs of Zion, pursue their dreams of hope and justice freely, in a land that they have come to know as home. As people of faith, we must seek to release the captives from the bonds that restrain them, to open the door to citizenship, to rejoice in the possibilities that these young people offer. The federal DREAM Act is one step toward creating this pathway out of captivity and into freedom to dream God's dream for all people.

Links to Online Videos from Faith Leaders on the DREAM Act

1. Lutheran Leaders discussing the importance of DREAM Act
<http://vimeo.com/17928977>
2. What does the Bible have to say about dreamers and their fight to pass the DREAM Act?
<http://vimeo.com/17853164>
3. The Rev. Mark Junkans, Executive Director, LINC Houston speaks about the DREAM Act
<http://vimeo.com/17938288>