

IMMIGRATION 2018

Friar Bob Hutmacher, ofm

I have a copy of our great grandfather's visa to leave the Kingdom of Prussia in 1854 from what is now Rheinland-Pfalz in western Germany. It's a document filled with both German Fraktur print and florid 19th century script. Gustav Hutmacher emigrated to the German enclave in Quincy, Illinois and soon opened a small grocery store/tavern. My father, Julius, was born in Gustav's family home on north 12th Street bordered on one side by Hutmacher Lane. My mother's family emigrated from Ireland and we've traced our Irish roots all the way back into the 18th century from Cork and Dublin. Our family's German-Irish story is just one among millions in the great 19th century immigration wave into the United States, including the friars expelled from Germany who founded our own Franciscan Province of the



Sacred Heart. Immigration continues to be an issue that demands headlines and inflames table discussions.

*Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!*

These memorable words from the base of our Statue of Liberty are but one way to see the basis for our own existence as a nation. People filled with a burning desire for basic human dignity and freedom founded our country. This invitation from Lady Liberty and the U.S. is often forgotten today, lost in a firestorm of political upheaval, outright fear and sinful hatred. The Catholic Church remains faithful to the biblical injunction

to "welcome the stranger". And we, the People of God, find ourselves torn, don't we? How do we remain faithful to the Church's social teachings and good citizens of the U.S. at the same time? Perhaps you know young people protected by DACA. But for how long will they be? It's painful to be torn, isn't it?

Pope Francis gave an eloquent homily on the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Here's a taste of it: *Local communities are sometimes afraid that the newly arrived will disturb the established order, will 'steal' something they have long labored to build up...newly arrived are afraid of confrontation, judgment, discrimination, failure. Having doubts and fears is not a sin. The sin is to allow these fears to determine our responses, to limit our choices, to compromise respect and generosity, to feed hostility and rejection. Immigrants must know and respect the laws, the culture and the traditions of the countries that take them in. At the same time communities need to open themselves without prejudices to newcomers' rich diversity, to understand the hopes and potential of the newly arrived as well as their fears and vulnerabilities.* Pope Francis has bravely said our president's proposed wall between the U.S. and Mexico "is not Christian."

If you read the history of Chicago and particularly the history of the Catholic Church in our city, racism and hatred is part and parcel of immigration. The potato famine in Ireland forced countless people to flee to the U.S. where they were considered to be so inferior that men were forced to accept dreaded jobs in the stockyards or to dig tunnels beneath Lake Michigan to create the offshore water intakes. Polish immigrants were called everything negative. Mexicans, Asians, middle Eastern people – almost all immigrants have borne the burden of being looked upon as less than worthy of citizenship and faced horrible opposition. Need we talk of slavery in the U.S.?

Our politicians presently create a climate in which hate-speak and blatant racist attitudes are considered the norm. In the January 17, 2018 Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page asked: "Is our president a racist or does he just say racist things?" After the infamous meeting to discuss DACA in the White House and the disparaging remarks made about African countries and Haiti,

Mr. Page reminded his readers that “Of the 1.4 million immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa who are 25 and older, 41% have a bachelor’s degree, compared with 30% of all immigrants and 32% of the U.S.-born population – and 38% of the 19,000 U.S. immigrants from Norway.” [This data is from Migration Policy Institute, Wash., D.C.]

Some people choose to feed fear and hatred rather than make efforts to understand others. Some people refuse to learn the very concrete reasons refugees flee to other countries for a new life. We may fail to see that the U.S. is not the only country in which people seek refuge. Talk with Europeans and you will hear how they also must learn how to live with immigrants from Africa, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Latin and South American nations have also been chosen for years as a new home by millions.

Our friars were expelled from mid-19th century Germany because of Bismarck’s Kulturkampf during which the government took control of Church appointments and governance. Religious orders were dispersed or thrown out of Germany (except some in education and health care). We may forget our own family histories and may even fail to understand that people flee hatred and war and injustices to this day because they simply want to live. I know a man from Iraq whose father led the whole family away from Saddam Hussein’s reign of terror in the middle of the night; they left everything behind. Everything! And there’s our constant reminder of how Mary, Joseph and their baby fled Herod’s cruel, ruthless slaughter.

I recently interviewed a good friend for this article; he left his home in South America and came here to study in 2001. “As an immigrant there are many days I feel alone when I don’t meet someone from my country.” He expressed the awful realization that sometimes when he hears politicians give rise to fear and opposition he feels like he doesn’t belong. And when other politicians do not try to alleviate fear or reshape attitudes, the feeling of being ostracized is only intensified.

He continued: “There are times I feel like I belong here but then other days when I don’t because part of my history is here and part of my history is back home. I’m happy among the people I serve and work with but then, when I watch television and see the ugliness in this

country, I don’t feel part of this culture. I don’t want to be part of the hate speech and I reject politicians when they talk about God and Christian values, then give a speech that spews division and discord. When I moved here I experienced double culture shock and it was very painful when I was told that I don’t belong in this country. My life as an immigrant brings great happiness and also challenges. I love the U.S. and will soon be a citizen; like everyone, I know the joys and imperfections of living here.”

In November of 2017 Julio Bunader, ofm, General Vicar of the Order of Friars Minor, addressed the Assembly of Friars of Europe. He spoke eloquently about the phenomenon of migration over the past two decades, the likes of



which the world has never seen. Millions are forced to flee violence, wars, persecution, poverty or environmental catastrophes. “Migrants and refugees are victims of an asymmetrical and inclusive globalization process, but also are the protagonists of new roads and new times. They are, in addition, privileged spokespeople for globalization. The changes of the last decades, especially in transportation and communications, have truly made our Earth into a village. On the other hand, the socio-economic inequalities between countries and regions invite the poorest of the poor to dream for and seek out a better future in foreign lands.” Julio called friars to respond as best we can to evaluate structures and evangelizing efforts that will help transform our world into what God has planned. We are called to see this wave of migration as a mystery full of signs that are part of God’s plan. We are to bring the joy of the Gospel to all and serve as ministers of God’s boundless mercy.

Looking again at the words of Pope Francis above, the question of immigration has two sides. Immigrants must know and respect the

laws, culture and tradition of the country that accepts them. *At the same time communities need to open themselves without prejudices to newcomers' rich diversity, to understand the hopes and potential of the newly arrived as well as their fears and vulnerabilities.* **Without prejudices.** And that is the most powerful challenge all of us face with immigration.

In his classic 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon Allport recognized the emotional, social, economic and historic dimensions of prejudice. He also proposed that prejudice is part of normal human functioning. *The human mind must think with the aid of categories....Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgment. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends upon it.* (p. 20) The true challenge happens when we encounter people who do not fit into our categories. The friend I interviewed for this article from South America appears to be Caucasian. When he speaks English his accent belies an origin from somewhere other than the U.S. When he speaks his native tongue people who speak that language but are from a country other than his don't know what to do with him.

Jesus often crossed over categories and boundaries to preach and heal. The Good Samaritan is a primary example, as are numerous encounters with lepers, dead people, women, public sinners and many classified by Judaism as unclean. He never let human categories stop the flow and power of God's healing grace. Jesus knew his mission was universal and obeyed God with his entire life. The fact that he never let any obstacle hinder his preaching the Good News of God's reign is a testimony we can incorporate into our own lives.

Br. Julio encourages us friars to be creative in how we receive immigrants, how we proclaim God's Kingdom. Understanding our call to service, understanding the dynamics of overcoming human prejudice and understanding the beauty of God's diversity in humanity – all this understanding can lead us to renewed vitality in how we accept one another.

In Baptism we anoint the person and say: *As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.* We share the priestly ministry of Jesus to proclaim to ALL people the

presence of God's salvation in Christ. ALL means ALL. Christ's Paschal Mystery opened the way of salvation to every one of God's children. Every human being is worthy of dignity and respect. So amid the heat of political battles, vitriolic hate-speak and centuries of cultural differences we Christians bear the moral responsibility to accept those who come to our country and those who remain where they are born as **God's children.** Our world has been made a village within just



a few years and grows smaller each day. But when we embrace the challenge of immigration with the eyes, mind and heart of Christ, we lead others – even our leaders – to see that diversity is an asset, not a threat. If Gustav Hutmacher had been forced back to Prussia, I wouldn't be writing these Legionnaire articles. I'm so grateful he wasn't rejected because I love to create and spread the Word!

Here's a practical way to appreciate other cultures. Chicago has more than 7,300 restaurants; we can eat "anywhere in the world". Food is a universal need and to discover new breads, drinks or vegetable dishes is a wondrous way to see a larger world. It's a way to appreciate differences and experience the fullness of Creation. Eating new foods can expand how we learn and accept other cultures, how people are different yet the same as ourselves. Reading the stories of Jesus going outside the boundaries of his Jewish culture enlarges our worldview and deepens our faith. Knowing the Gospels can bring inner peace that helps one be more patient with people who divide rather than unite. Remember how patient God is with you at times! Even the beast of white supremacy can be defeated with kindness. Remember Dr. King's words: "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

Thank you supporting our ministry at St. Peter's. We try our best to give you our best, even when faced with constraints. Your faith enables us to proclaim the Kingdom in creative, new ways. May God fill you with peace and everything that is good. *Fr. Bob Hutmacher, ofm*