

In June of 2017 staff from the Archdiocese of Seattle sought a way to bring together different Catholic communities to address the crisis of anti-immigrant rhetoric, government policies, and government initiatives. They saw a need to initiate dialogue among , on the one hand, justice and service ministry groups from predominantly white Catholic parishes and, on the other hand, communities of Hispanic immigrants, some of whose members are undocumented and vulnerable. Staff from the Missions Office of the Archdiocese held listening sessions and interviewed individuals in 12 Hispanic Catholic communities in Western Washington to ask, “How are you and your community experiencing the current immigration crisis?” A report of what was heard was published, listing the five most important needs (see below), along with recommendations to meet those needs. Leaders in some Catholic communities and Archdiocesan staff used that report to inform their work initiating and promoting various ministries and events to support migrants and refugees.

In June 2019, the same staff returned to eight of the same Hispanic Catholic communities to update the report, to listen again to Hispanic Catholics relate how they are living this situation two years later. This time, in addition to asking for general impressions of the situation of immigrants, we asked, “**Today, how important and urgent are the five top needs listed in 2017?**” What follows is a summary of what was heard. Like the previous study, this update is not a social scientific study, but rather a wide-spread pastoral listening, intended to stimulate action for dignity and justice for immigrants and in solidarity with immigrants.

What has stayed the same?

The uncertainty and the fear persist, present everywhere, though not at the surface, as it was in 2017. The anxious uncertainty is rooted more deeply, in the background, but as close as the daily news. *“There have not been problems with the police here, but we’re nervous. We saw in the news about the caravans, and the way Trump talked about them – an invasion – and what the government was going to do about them. And then we wonder, What measures are they going to take against us?”*

There is a need for legal aid and a widespread desire for solidarity and support from the Catholic community; these were named in almost every listening session.

There is an urban-rural divide, mirroring our state’s economy. There are far fewer services in rural areas, and though unemployment is low, there are fewer employment options. Rural Hispanic Catholic communities are not feeling much archdiocesan presence, in the arena of immigration or other areas. The further one travels from urban and suburban King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties – and one does not need to do far – the fewer immigrant services, the fewer networks for advocacy and solidarity beyond churches themselves.

What has changed?

The way immigrants perceive and describe their situation reflects the national situation: **an immediate crisis has given way to a chaotic landscape of threatening policies and federal initiatives, and ongoing climate of anti-immigrant rhetoric.**

No single need emerged as a top priority, as different communities named different needs and different efforts or services in their communities in the past two years. The needs are not as common across Western Washington as they were two years ago.

Below is what was heard regarding the five needs that emerged in 2017:

1. Legal Aid: Legal Aid continues to be a need everywhere, though only in rural areas was it named with urgency. Participants repeatedly requested asked for a list of attorneys recommended by the church; no one outside of Skagit Valley mentioned Catholic Immigration Legal Services, and no one anywhere knew of the list of recommended immigration attorneys available on the Archdiocesan website. Arrests continue at a steady pace (and at this writing, an increase is threatened), and in some areas, local law enforcement is collaborating with ICE. Existing legal aid services (sometimes a two-hour drive) and reliable private attorneys are overloaded.
 - *“People are looking for hope. This is what some lawyers take advantage of!”*
 - *“The good lawyers will tell you when you don’t have a case. It’s very hard to find a lawyer you can trust.”*
2. Workshops on Know Your Rights/Family Emergency Plans. This was named as a need in three communities. There have been workshops in some areas, and they have made a difference. But attendance has been spotty, and some said their peers will not bother to attend workshops where actual legal assistance is not offered. Some shared a hard-earned experience that simply knowing one’s rights does not guarantee those rights.
 - *“Knowing your rights is good, but here, the police won’t respect those rights, so what good is knowing them?”*
 - *“The problem isn’t just knowing your rights – when to open the door, the two kinds of warrants - the authorities here don’t respect our rights. Even if you know your rights, the police will do what they want.”*
3. Mental Health Services for Children. Two rural areas expressed that this was still a need, emphasizing that few school counselors were aware of the reality that Hispanic families are living. Others stated that parents need support in leading their families through this stressful time and in speaking about this reality with their children.
4. Addressing Racism and Nationalism among White Catholics. In every conversation, participants shared terrible stories of racist treatment in public, at work, and in school. Echoing what was said in 2017, participants acknowledged that they have always dealt with racism, but this behavior among whites is more open and blatant since the 2016 election. Some reported receiving support from their pastors or individual Anglo parishioners, No group reported open racial tension or strife in their parish. but neither did any group report a real sense of collective support or solidarity from the white community in their parish for the needs of vulnerable immigrants in the Hispanic community. Some communities mentioned a subtle racism in how parish resources are allocated shared (e.g. space and schedules of events) and in how decisions are made. Only one community reported hearing one homily on discrimination.
 - *“We need the people who run the parish to learn about our culture and our faith. We are treated like renters here, like second class citizens. This parish is your home as long as you practice Anglo Catholicism.”*

- *“Trump gave license to a lot of racist behavior when he started as president; it’s a bit more tranquilo now, but still worse than before.”*
- *“We need workshops on racism in this town. We experience it when we look for work. Work is there, but we won’t get hired.”*

5. More Visible Solidarity in the Catholic Church in Western Washington. Nearly every community visited named this as a need. In all the listening sessions, two staff persons mentioned Archdiocesan events (e.g. Know Your Rights Workshops and Walking and Witnessing for Immigrant Families). Though all communities reported living with uncertainty, fear, racism, only one report hearing any preaching on this topic. No one recalled a homily that addressed persecution or scapegoating of immigrants, inhumane treatment of detainees, or justice for immigrants. Participants reported racist words or attitudes in a few parish communities, and many reported feeling a real sense of belonging and respect from parish leaders. Some communities have made real efforts to bring together English-speaking and Hispanic communities within the parish, and are feeling the fruits of those efforts. Very few people were affected by or even aware of efforts in other parishes for immigrants and refugees. In many sessions, asking about solidarity surfaced a real frustration in the listening sessions.

- *“So what? You were here two years ago, and what’s happened since? We don’t see any changes.”*
- *“These marches and conferences – who do they benefit? We keep telling our stories, and nothing happens.”*
- *“There are “two communities” here in this parish, and they are in communication, thanks to years of effort in the parish. The two are coming together more.”*

Conclusions:

The 2017 Groundwork for Solidarity with Immigrants report was just that: *groundwork*. Since that 2017 report, many Catholic communities have learned a great deal *about* the situation of immigrants and refugees, have initiated ministries and taken action to serve and advocates *for* immigrants, and have participate in Archdiocesan events (e.g. the immigration summits and Walking and Witnessing with Immigrant Families). All that has been solid groundwork, but vulnerable Hispanic communities, especially in rural Western Washington have not yet experienced solidarity with the majority white Catholic community and institutional Church. The good efforts of many parishes - mostly in King County – have not reached the vulnerable Hispanic communities in rural areas. In the arena of dealing with the immigrant reality, they do not report much connection with and support from other Catholic communities beyond their own parish. Hispanic communities are still waiting for what’s next: action in solidarity with them.

This is a liminal time. Two years into the current Administration’s anti-immigrant strategy, there is a danger of this ongoing cascade of anti-immigrant rhetoric, policies, and initiatives becoming a “new normal”, simply the national reality that whites and citizens accept. Will Catholic communities accept this or take the next steps toward action for justice in solidarity with immigrants?