

Laudato Si in Action

In Laudato Si, Pope Francis refers to a throw-away culture where we consume things once and then throw them away. He also extends the concept of throw-away to people:

The “throwaway culture” has become a pandemic today, and it leaves migrants and displaced people without a voice and at the mercy of those who exploit them, Pope Francis said.

Suzanna and I were fortunate to attend the Catholic Immigration Summit at St Catherine of Siena Parish this past weekend. There we learned about the plight of immigrants and how others in our community are supporting our immigrant brothers and sisters. We learned that most of the current wave of immigrants are from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, all countries with weak governments and abject poverty and violence.

It's hard to know what to do, how to help those who are suffering. Seattle is not on the border and the suffering of our immigrant neighbors is easy to forget. At the summit, we heard from representatives of three Western Washington parishes about what they were doing to respond to the current crisis.

St Luke's in Shoreline started an immigrant and refugee initiative that is tied to Catholic teachings and appeals to parishioners from two directions: top-down through the mind and bottom-up via the soul.

A group from Holy Family of Kirkland went on a trip to volunteer at the Respite Center run by Catholic Charities in McAllen, Texas. The center provides a place for the countless men, women, children, and infant refugees to rest, have a warm meal, a shower, and change into clean clothing as well as receive medicine and other supplies, before continuing onto their journey.

Joe Hastings of St Leo's of Tacoma presented his parish's multi-pronged response to the immigrant crisis that includes supporting families of detainees at the nearby Northwest Detention Center.

What can you do? One approach would be to connect with Holy Family, St Leo's, or St Luke's and assist with their efforts. You can also volunteer with Advocates for Immigrants in Detention Northwest or with St James Cathedral Immigrant Assistance. Additional ideas on how to help immigrants can be found at the Archdiocese's Share the Journey website you will find at <http://seattlearchdiocese.org/stj/>.

Each August, a group of St John's middle school students spend a week in the Skagit Valley ministering to migrant farm workers. This year's mission trip is full now, but you can still help by donating non-perishable food and diapers at mass the weekend of August 10 and 11.

And as a follow-up to the middle school mission trip, a bunch of us volunteered at the same food bank in the Skagit Valley last year to help distribute food and serve a thanksgiving meal to our migrant neighbors on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. This will likely be an annual event, so please look for this volunteer opportunity in November of this year.

Finally, you can also be the voice for those without a voice; when someone makes a disparaging remark about “those immigrants”, kindly remind them that they too are our neighbors and we need to respond with compassion. It can't hurt to add that we are all descendants of immigrants.

I will leave you with these inspiring words from Pope Francis from his speech at the World Day of Migrants in Belgium: *Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women, and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more.*

Working together, we can help take care of our common home and ALL of its inhabitants. Visit <http://saintfrancisseattle.wordpress.com> for all prior Laudato Si in Action columns.

Paul Litwin