A Note from CCSJ Director Maria Teresa Gaston

Our often-consulted Creighton economics professor, Dr. Ernie Goss, explains that immigrants are vital for our economy (personal communication, March 11, 2011). Our U.S. Bishops, Jesuit provincials, and our CCSJ experiences tell us it not only makes economic sense, but it is vital to the health of our church and our souls to welcome the immigrant. Our government leaders have not had success in passing needed reforms to our immigration laws to facilitate a legal and just path for future workers and a path to earned legal status for the millions of immigrants who are contributing their work, taxes, entrepreneurial spirit, faith, and culture.

In a campus poll conducted this semester by the CCSJ Advocacy Team, the vast majority of Creighton respondents (86%; N = 577) favored an earned path to citizenship. (This was a bit higher than the 68% of U.S. adults with this view according to a Pew Research Center poll in 2010). One third (32%) of our respondents were aware of the Jesuit Provincials’ public stance on this issue and 54% were aware that the U.S. Bishops advocated just and humane comprehensive immigration reform. We are grateful to all who participated in the survey and who are taking the time to learn more. Many in the CCSJ and at Creighton have been very active this year promoting dialogue and understanding on this contentious human and civil rights issue of our day.

Through weekly service and service trips, many students have been able to meet and interact with Mayan immigrants from Guatemala who share their faith and culture in a vibrant community here in Omaha, Comunidad Maya Pixan Ixim (Heart of Corn). Others are learning the Arabic names of the Sudanese children they play with after school at Mercy Housing’s Mason Apartments just south of campus. A new CCSJ effort this year has been helping soon-to-be citizens practice for their nerve-wracking oral naturalization test at the Juan Diego Center.

These encounters and friendships formed through weekly service and week-long service trips have motivated our students to learn more about the obstacles and barriers to participation and justice for immigrants in our land and to advocate on their behalf in Lincoln and in Washington, D.C. They understand how we all benefit when reasonable, humane federal reform will make it possible for undocumented immigrants among us to peacefully and confidently integrate and contribute as our ancestors have done in the past. I am very proud of our students, faculty, Jesuits, staff, alumni, and administrators at Creighton who have chosen to walk the path of solidarity and justice with our undocumented immigrant sisters and brothers. Enjoy these pictures and articles that capture some of their history-making.

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Coming face to face with immigrants and refugees...

**Student Reflections on CCSJ weekly service sites**

Several of the CCSJ weekly service sites allow students the opportunity to interact with immigrants and refugees. Through their conversations, service, and reflections, students are able to chip away at the boundaries that often separate them from immigrants and refugees. Tutoring kids, teaching ESL classes or helping immigrants on their path towards citizenship allow volunteers the chance to better understand the issues that these communities face - as well as foster some great relationships along the way. Weekly service sites will continue again next fall.

**Mason Apartments:**
Mason Apartments is a branch of Mercy Housing near Creighton that is home to many Sudanese refugee families. Volunteers come to help tutor and spend time with kids.

*Daniel Barrett ('11):*
“I spent a large portion of my first years in undergrad approaching school with such a single track mindset. Spending time with the children during service has reminded me that life is much more than the grades we make. Instead, life is fulfilled and made worthwhile by those experiences we share with others. When helping the children at Mason with homework or simply sharing the experience of playing a board game I find true happiness. My interactions with the children crumble the towering walls of age and personal experience, giving way to a genuine shared experience of two equal individuals.”

**Pixan-Ixim**
Pixan Ixim is a Mayan community in South Omaha that offers bi-weekly ESL, literacy, and citizenship classes. Volunteers help teach and assist with childcare.

*Monica Ste. Marie ('14):* Booker T Washington once declared, “If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else”. This paradox of self-help through altruism is exemplified each and every week at Pixan Ixim, wherein students and faculty donate a little time and patience in exchange for so much more. Last semester, I was fortunate enough to teach Level One English with John and Janet, two adult volunteers with hearts of gold and truly boundless ingenuity. While my translational skills certainly came in handy for asking and answering questions, I discovered that I really relied upon Janet’s elementary education background to present the material in a cohesive and manageable way. Without a doubt, Pixan Ixim overflows with new opportunities to teach and be taught. By coming to Pixan Ixim, I have learned far more than I had ever expected. My hope for Pixan Ixim is that I can help students break out of the cruel confines of the English-Spanish linguistic barrier into a world of scholarship and greater opportunity.

**Naturalization Classes:**
These classes are offered at the Juan Diego Center and help immigrants study for their Naturalization Test. This is a new weekly service site for the 2010-11 year.

*Cecilia Lorenz ('14):* “Each individual has a story behind them. They [the students] have not stopped working to make their dreams come true. Their hard work and perseverance materialize when they take the test and become citizens.”

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[Image of Playing around at Mason apartments.]

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[Image of Mason Apartments volunteers with children.]
PUTTING A FACE ON IMMIGRATION

Crossing borders on Spring Break Service Trips

Over Spring break, 216 students participated in the Spring Break Service Trips program. Of the several host sites, the following allowed students the chance to spend time with and learn more about immigrants and/or refugees:

- Omaha Latino, OneWorld & Pixan Ixim
- Minneapolis, MN Ascension Parish
- Morton, MS EXCEL Center
- Omaha, NE- Refugee Community
- El Paso, TX Columban Border Ministries
- Arlington, VA Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish
- Albuquerque, NM Trinity House Catholic Worker

Several host sites in the fall will also engage participants with immigration and/or refugee issues.

“I felt most alive hearing from children who had crossed the border. Their stories broke my heart and inspired me to learn more about immigration injustices.” - El Paso participant

“Hearing immigrant stories helped me to look beyond the label of “undocumented immigrant” and see them as humans struggling to survive and making a better living.” - Minneapolis participant

Separated From His Parents

The personal immigration story of CU student Jose Aguilar (‘13)

As a 16 year-old at Creighton Prep, Jose Aguilar received some jarring news that would tear a schism in his family life forever. A voice on the other end of the phone informed him that his parents had been detained by the Immigration and Naturalization Service while at work. Although his parents had been in the U.S. over 20 years and had followed the legal process to apply for residency, they would end up being sent back from their children and the country they had called home for years.

Now preparing to start his junior year at Creighton studying Social Work, Jose must navigate college life without his parents. He still stays in contact with them, but often the reality of it becomes hard to bear. “We talk at least once a week. I could call them daily, but it gets hard emotionally,” Jose said. Ten years before that fateful November day, his family had commenced the arduous process of becoming legal residents. Along their path, they faced scamming and were denied residency twice. When they moved to California from Nebraska in 2001 to find better work opportunities, their legal battle continued.

After being detained, they were given a probationary period of six months to figure out what they were going to do with their two children (Jose and younger brother Eduardo) and their belongings. During this time, they had to check in monthly with ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement), but things did not go as planned.

“The first check-up came, and once again they were detained and never released,” Jose said. “They were sent to Douglas County jail for two and half a months and were deported in January...Their attorney at the time was supposed to be working on their case to see what he could do for them, but he really never did anything. I had 10 minutes with my mom and dad, and had to tell them they were going to be deported, were going to lose everything they ever worked for in the U.S.”

His parents’ fate seemed especially unjust since they considered the U.S. their home. “They had not been in Mexico for over 20 years, so [they] had no idea what life was going to be there,” Jose said. “They did everything legal their whole lives, always filed their taxes, were upstanding citizens, had perfect credit history, worked hard, and put me through Catholic education. They ICE officials were pretty much heartless the whole time; they told my parents that me being in high school was not enough to keep them here.”

Since his parents could not stay, ICE suggested Jose and Eduardo go to Mexico - a country neither even know. Though his brother moved to Mexico a year later to be with his parents, Jose stayed in Omaha. Due to financial issues, he has only been able to go Mexico one time in three years. His brother will be coming back next year to attend Jesuit Middle School.

In the absence of his parents, the surrounding community gathered together to help fill the void. It raised money for his education and provided him with emotional support. Jose is grateful for all those who have been there for him. “I graduated from Prep with help of community and friends,” Jose said. “They became my family. Jim Swanson, my counselor became a father figure. He still keeps in contact on a daily basis...”

(continued on pg. 8)
Echoing Christ’s call to love one’s neighbor and to give voice to the marginalized, the Catholic Church has traditionally taken a strong stance on policies that impact immigrants, migrants, and refugees. Catholic Social Teaching urges us to welcome the stranger into our midst, and to ensure that he/she is recognized and treated as a dignified human being with rights.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have raised their voices to advocate for humane and just Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR). Their call for reform includes: earned path to legalization, enforcement, future worker program, family-based immigration reform, addressing root causes, and restoration of due process rights. (see the USCCB website for more info)

Additional faith-based resources:
- Immigration webpage for the Archdiocese of Omaha
- Justice for Immigrants
- Archbishop Lucas speaks out on Immigration Reform
- Jesuit Provincials call for Immigration Reform
- Bishops’ letter to Obama
- Catholic Comments Podcast (Maria Teresa Gaston, Fr. Andy)

 Welcoming our brothers and sisters: immigration, refugees and the Catholic Church

A nation of immigrants

What is your own immigration story?
My four grandparents immigrated from Sicily. My Grandfather on my father’s side changed all of his children’s names to make them more American due to prejudice. Our original family name was Alesandro. He didn’t teach them Italian because he wanted them to speak English. Because of the 14th amendment, my parents became citizens.

How do you view the current immigration situation?
I believe our system has to change. It is broken and immoral. America has two signs - one at Ellis Island and one at the Mexican border. Ellis has a plaque at the statue of liberty welcoming immigrants and the other sign says STAY OUT. We fear what we don’t know, we demonize. When we make the unknown an enemy, it’s easy to rally support to go against it.

We have a system, which won’t find its way to legalize 11 million people who keep economy strong, while also debating sending them home. No one is rationally asking what would we do without a majority of our drywallers, migrant workers, and meat packers. What’s missing is a comprehensive approach, starting with why do people come? In El-Salvador, it was the people who let Congress know that they no longer stood for the regime. That’s why the war ended, because they stood up. We need to let elected officials know that we are for human dignity or not. This is not a matter of law vs. order.

What can we as Catholics and individuals do?
Be a voice for the voiceless. Speak out against or in favor of laws. Become friends. The longest-lasting impact is to enter into relationship so we become less afraid, less inoculated with prejudice. When we get to know a person as “Pablo” or “Maria,” you can expand your wisdom, and then become an advocate. It goes beyond demonstrations...it goes to helping educate others so the culture of bigotry and fear is lessened.

Do the Jesuit thing to promote a faith that does justice. Jesus loves us unconditionally. He loves us because we need loving and he loves those most who need love the most - those on the margins The Gospels are filled with this: “whenever you do it to the least, you do it to me...” You can’t be a Christian and ignore these words.

It comes down to one thing. All humans are children of same God, of the same creator. We are blessed to be in country where we have more leftovers than people have to eat, the liberty to criticize leaders, and the responsibility to be a light for the rest of the world.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt. 25-35)
Campaign against the “Arizona-like” LB48

During the first part of the year, several Creighton staff members and students joined with the greater Nebraska community to unite in an effort against LB48 - Nebraska's proposed “Arizona-style” immigration enforcement measure introduced by Senator Janssen. During the campaign, the CCSJ spread awareness about the bill, organized a calling campaign, and gathered signatures through its Advocacy Alerts.

On January 27th, a delegation of about 40 students and Omaha community members travelled to Lincoln on for the “Unity Rally for Nebraska Civil and Human Rights” at the Capitol to protest LB48 and promote more humane immigration reform. A few groups spoke with their state senator about the issue. Some students also attended the LB48 hearing on March 2nd.

On March 10th, the Nebraska Legislature’s Judiciary Committee ruled it would not advance LB48 - a decision that emphasizes immigration reform must come from the federal (not state) level. This prompted much relief among the greater Nebraska community, though the battle may not be over yet. Regardless of the future, the impact of those who united against this and other immigration legislation cannot be underemphasized.

Becca Harvey (‘11) on the Unity Rally:

“There was a lot of good that came from the rally, and positive hope for the future...We stood side by side with our sisters and brothers born in Nebraska, Arizona, California, Guatemala, Mexico. In the end, we are all community members of the state of Nebraska, and deserve the right to live with dignity and free from fear.”
When love gets tangled up with Immigration laws:  
CU 2007 Alum Alicia Robey fell in love with Tigstu Sebsibe while they were both working for Catholic development initiatives in Bonga, Ethiopia (Tigstu’s hometown). When they decided to marry, they encountered a myriad of difficulties related to immigration. She shares her story.
Ruben Garcia, founder of Anunciation House in El Paso, TX speaks at Creighton

In February, Ruben Garcia came to Creighton to speak on immigration. Garcia founded the Anunciation House—a shelter for undocumented individuals in El Paso, TX. During his talk, entitled Welcoming the Stranger: Immigrant Hospitality at the Border and Creighton, Garcia shared his own experiences with Immigration, and tried to dispel many of the popular myths surrounding immigration. Prior to his talk, Garcia also was the honored guest at a “Soup and Stories” sharing session in the CCSJ.

Ruben speaks with each of CCSJ’s border immersion groups in the fall and spring. He will host a group at the Anunciation House this fall with CU Alums and post grad volunteers Becca Harvey (‘11) and Jacob Huju (‘11).

To hear his full talk, check out the CCSJ website.

Local
• OTOC (Omaha Together One Community) Just Immigration Action Team is working on ongoing local issues. Please e-mail gcinterfaith@aol.com if interested ([OTOC website]

• Senator Brad Ashford is holding hearings and townhall forums this summer and upcoming fall.

• Stand up for Immigrants in your State Petition: [click here to sign] (Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform)

• World Refugee Day: Saturday, June 18th at Benson High School. FREE event (Facebook page)

National
• Comprehensive Immigration Reform needs to happen at the Federal Level. Please contact your members of congress to let them know your concerns. ([Find contact info)

• DREAM Act reintroduced in the Senate: Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) reintroduced the DREAM Act bill in the U.S. Senate. This amended version provides a slightly narrower definition of eligibility for a path to citizenship than the original. However, it would still allow undocumented immigrants who came to the United States at a young age to be put on a path toward citizenship after meeting several requirements. [Video on why DREAM is important] (Source: Sojourners)

• Executive order petition: Recently President Obama spoke in El Paso, Texas, emphasizing his commitment to immigration reform. In the meantime, though, thousands of DREAM Act eligible youth are left in the dark beneath the threat of deportation and an uncertain future. Past presidents have utilized their power to issue executive orders to help relieve the situation of the marginalized and the oppressed. Notable executive orders include: Equal Employment Opportunity (Lyndon B. Johnson), Affirmative Action (John F. Kennedy), Works Progress Administration (FDR), Desegregation of schools (Dwight D. Eisenhower), and the Emancipation Proclamation. Sign a petition [click here] to urge President Obama to issue an executive order to halt deportations until the DREAM Act has passed. (Source: Presente.org)
(continued from pg. 3) Jose Aguilar:

“...even though I’m an adult and on my own. I don’t think I could have survived. I know there’s hundreds of other kids in my place that did not necessarily have the help that I had. I truly feel blessed for all the help I was given.”

Since coming to Creighton, Jose’s commitment to education has only deepened.

“I have been forced to grow as a person, but it’s helped me to stay focused,” Jose said. “Failure’s not an option for me. I cannot fail, I have to succeed. If I do not graduate, there is no hope for my parents to come back. If I do not have a career, there’s no hope.”

Since his parents’ deportation, he has become a strong supporter of immigration reform.

“I became really aware of immigration,” he said. “Obviously we have a problem, and I believe there should be some type of reform. Not necessarily just handed out - there should be some requirements, like you have to be a good person, learn the language, etc.”

With so much anti-immigrant sentiment stemming from the myth immigrants do not want to learn English/adapt to American culture, Jose urges people to look back on American history.

“It’s kind of hard to do it [in the] first generation,” Jose said. “Look at it from the time U.S. started… it takes a couple generations for families to get established and get Americanized.”

As Senators and Representatives continue to debate immigration reform, Jose sets his sights on working with individuals affected by immigration.

“I know I want to work with a non-profit that deals with people in this type of situation,” he said. “I do want to go on law school, become an immigration attorney, but with everything I face, I don’t think I can do it right of college. I want to work directly with undocumented people - let these families learn about the u.s., what rights they and their children have available to them.”

While a student at Creighton, Jose has appreciated the opportunity to dialogue about immigration. In his communications class, for instance, he chose to do a series of speeches on the DREAM Act.

“At first, [my] classmates were really against the DREAM act, but when I gave the third (persuasive) speech, I used personal stories, mine included, and their views changed drastically,” Jose said. “Once you put that personal attachment, opinions change drastically...Until you know someone, you really don’t realize.”

As a whole, Jose admires Creighton’s commitment to immigration and social issues.

“[Creighton] might not do a lot on the stage, but it does behind the scenes,” he said. “By accepting undocumented students Creighton stepped up and said we’re going to give you an education. The Multicultural Affairs Office offers trips to work in campos, live the life of the migrant. People don’t realize all this.”

Even though his personal story brings up matters at the center of the contentious immigration debate, Jose is not afraid to share his experiences.

“I don’t hide it, it’s my life,” Jose said. “It frustrates me when people come at me with wrong information. That’s what it takes for change – a group of individuals to come and say this is what’s going on. I look at the civil rights movement - they tried to do a lot for a long time, but you bring change when add that personal feeling. Everything changed with Rosa Parks, for instance. I encourage people in my situation to share their stories in person. I speak out because the undocumented can’t.”

Jesuit Journey’s article on Jose and his brother