Migration: Balancing our roles as citizens as well as disciples

By Douglas Alles

In an encyclical written shortly after Vatican II, Pope Paul VI identified the issue of human migration as central to emerging Christian social concern.

“We cannot,” he states, “insist too much on the duty of giving foreign- ers a hospitable reception; [this] is a duty imposed by human solidarity and by Christian charity.

The moment for action,” the Pope stated in 1967, “has reached a critical juncture.” Populorum Progressio 67, 80.

Fifty years later, the scale and complexity of this issue makes Saint Paul VI sound prophetic, if not understated. Migration has always been a vexing challenge.

Europe, now at the center of great migratory pressure, is itself a com- posite of migration histories, noted in the journeys of the Angles, Saxons, Vikings, Franks, Goths, Visigoths, Huns, Vandals, and Normans across that continent. Even Native Americans are known to have European origins. And in nearly every instance, migra- tion proved contentious and difficult.

What pressures people to leave established and familiar communities and homeland? Why are there more than 240 million people in compelled migration today – more than 3 percent of the world’s population?

Forced migration occurs because of financial pressures and material want (economic migration), persecution and war (refugees), or because people are lured by false promises of work into forced labor and exploitation (victims of human trafficking).

Further, many migrants are “inter- nationally displaced persons” who never leave their country but who live in camps of isolation and privation in their homeland.

Because of econom- ic, political, and envi- ronmental instability, the number of migrants is growing rapidly and may exceed 400 mil- lion people within the next 20 years. This represents one of the single greatest challenges to human dignity and security in our lifetime – possibly in human history.

Economic insecurity alone will continue as a primary cause of migra- tion – 75 percent of the world’s population lives on less than $10 a day. If, as the adage goes, capital doesn’t go to where the people are, then people will go to where the capital is.

With migration comes the topic of borders, not just in the U.S., but across the world. For many, the solution to human migration lies in border secu- rity, border walls, border enforcement and rapid border repatriation. Yet these physical and procedural border actions alone will fail to solve this “task of our lifetime.” For that, we must take up the difficult task of addressing immigration in all its messy complex- ity.

That means facing another kind of border, the border zone of debate and tension.

Here we find the border between sovereign rights and human rights, civil law and natural law, national security and human insecurity, and, for Christians: citizenship and dis- cipleship.

I believe that the Church has a valuable role to play in these border zones of tension by offering language and insight that will help us bridge the divisions we face.

The Church affirms the right of a nation to fulfill the duties and ex- pectations of being a member of that nation or state.

Alongside this duty, the Church proposes the demands of disciple- ship to her followers; the challenge to those of faith in Christ to respond, in solidarity and Christian love, to those in need.

Migration is a great and common human experience. It touches on virtually all elements of our Catholic social doctrine which include all of the following: human dignity, solidarity, the common good, distributive justice, legal justice, commutative justice, social justice, the priority of labor (people) over capital, the prefer- enctional option and love for the poor, subsidiarity, the universal destination of goods, authentic development, the centrality of family, and the realization of humanism.

This doctrine of social teaching is a summary of our life in God and a call to “right connectedness” in our relations with each other. In the case of migration, it calls us to enter the hard border zones of this world with a Gospel message of love and justice and the Church’s perennial wisdom about human dignity and solidarity.

Let us bring a compassionate heart to the border zones of human migra- tion, holding the tensions we find there with a love of neighbor. We are sure to find the Lord there as well.

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Q &A: U.S. Senator James Risch of Idaho

Idaho U.S. Senator James Risch, also a former governor and state legislator, now chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Risch is a practicing Catholic. The Idaho Catholic Register asked him the following questions:

What in your view are the essential elements of a comprehensive immigration reform package? We must have border security and an organized entry program, so we can screen migrants entering and we must determine a reasonable limit, so our system of support is not overwhelmed.

Do you agree that young people here under DACA should not be deported (barring they have not committed any crimes) and that a solution should be found to letting them remain in this country? Yes, I believe a solution should be found to allow these young people to stay in our country.

What’s the most important thing you hope is included in the new immigration reform bill? The number one priority is to have a comprehensive immigration reform package?

Do you agree with the statement that seeking asylum is not a crime and, if so, what is your response to President Trump’s decision to send troops to our southern border to prevent their entry if they get to the United States? Those seeking asylum in our country must enter legally and respect our immigration laws. As a nation we have a right and a duty to protect our borders. I agree we must find humane solutions that honor the dignity of life and respect the rule of law.

We need a rock solid guest worker program that allows workers from other countries to come into this country as guest workers to meet the needs of our industries. This is crucial for our state.

I meet regularly with businesses that need and employ guest workers to solve this problem and several solutions have been proposed but not passed. It is still a work in progress.

I voted no because I believe we could do better on the security provisions in the bill and add a work- able guest worker program in the bill.

Did you vote for or against the 2013 legislation (passed the Senate 68-32, but not taken up in the House), the so-called “Gang of Eight” legislation on immigration reform? Briefly explain the reasoning behind your vote. We need a rock solid guest worker program that allows workers from other countries to come into this country as guest workers to meet the needs of our industries. This is crucial for our state.

Do you agree with the statement that seeking asylum is not a crime and, if so, what is your response to President Trump’s decision to send troops to our southern border to prevent their entry if they get to the United States? Those seeking asylum in our country must enter legally and respect our immigration laws. As a nation we have a right and a duty to protect our borders. I agree we must find humane solutions that honor the dignity of life and respect the rule of law.