
Immigration, the Story of the Church in Contested Spaces

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I first want to thank the committee of the World Mission Institute who invited me to this forum for a conversation about immigration, which is timely given the history of immigration in our country and specifically, the events of the past few months.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge the Illinois Nation and many other indigenous peoples whose lands were settled by the immigrants of the European colonization. I also want to acknowledge the Coahuiltecas, Karankawa, and the many and diverse native peoples of Texas whose lands were first taken, then settled, by the Spanish immigrants and then by the Anglo-Saxon colonization project with the endorsement of the U.S. doctrine of Manifest Destiny.

In the United States today, the political powers that govern us must be reminded that the policy of “Manifest Destiny,” whatever its historic underpinnings, cannot ever turn today on the color of one’s skin, or on one’s ethnicity, or on one’s heritage of origin. It is incumbent upon us, people of faith and conscience, to point out its flaws and its dangers to both native peoples and to immigrants who migrate to this country.

As the son of immigrant parents from Mexico, I have experienced life between the worldview of two passports: the U.S. American and the Mexican passport that belonged to my father who was a Mexican citizen until he passed in 1998 at the age of 95. During his sojourn in the United States while living in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas, he held a green residential card that he would promptly display every time we crossed the border from Texas to go visit his family in Reynosa, Mexico. Reynosa is located across the Rio Grande River, or better stated—the Rio Bravo as it is originally named in Mexico and later renamed by the United States. My father crossed the border into Texas from Reynosa in 1918 with his parents and siblings. Together they fled their homestead in northern Mexico because of the economic and political upheaval of the Mexican Civil War that lasted for ten years.

My mother was born in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas three months after her parents and her older siblings crossed the border from Mexico in 1913. Crossing the border was not uncommon nor as difficult during those years. It was a matter of going “al otro lado,” to the other side, a common expression of the borderlands. My mother’s family also fled the ravages of the civil war, and the danger posed to their lives. They joined the many other families who emigrated to the southern border of the United

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States for the same reasons. They were part of the Mexican diaspora who contributed to the economic development of the region.

When my parents married in 1936, they opened a merchandise store in San Juan, Texas, in the Rio Grande Valley where I was born. They served the community of agricultural workers for fifty years until they retired in 1986. During those years, they and their children served the Mexican laborers who came across from Mexico with agricultural work permits that were issued as part of the Bracero Program of 1942-1964. The word *bracero* comes from the Spanish word *brazo*, or “arms,” meaning labor. We met many of them over the years and we knew them by their first names—Don Felipe, Don Pablo, among others. They were hardworking laborers who supplied the region with the vegetables and fruits that we sold at our store. Like them, my parents worked hard and put six children through college in the pursuit of their American dream. Two of those children became Lutheran pastors and one was appointed the Commissioner of Education for the state of Texas.

The historical landscape

To speak about immigration in terms of the southern border of the United States, I would first like to paint a historical landscape of the southern border as depicted by Chicana feminist and poet Gloria Anzaldua in her book *Borderlands, La Frontera, the New Mestiza*. Gloria grew up in south Texas not far from where I was born. She was no stranger to being ostracized as an alien in her land of origin. She penned the following words:

The U.S.–Mexican border *es una herida abierta* (is an open wound) where the Third World grates against

the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* (the ones crossed over) live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the Mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal.” [Some] in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, whether they’re Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot. The only “legitimate” inhabitants are those in power. ... Tension grips the inhabitants of the borderlands like a virus. Ambivalence and unrest reside here, and death is no stranger.¹

If Gloria were living and writing today, she would add that immigrants are placed in cages or imprisoned in detention centers to await deportation to their home countries. Gloria’s words may sound abrasive and unkind to our ears, but I have known and ministered with and among these folks that Gloria describes for over thirty years. For that reason, I assigned her book to my students at the Seminary of the Southwest where I taught for over twenty years. She helped prepare my students for the reality of native peoples and the many sojourners who emigrate to the borderlands from throughout the world. When sojourners cross the southern border, they enter this “third country” or third space that has been a major part of my lived experience. One of my students who served in the military in south Korea described it as the demilitarized zone of that country.

People of the borderlands have experienced their own version of “Jim Crow” laws and alien otherness dating back to the U.S. war of aggression with Mexico of 1846–1848.² During one legislative stroke of the pen in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo of 1848, a treaty that the U.S. never fully honored, Mexico lost one half of its national territory and in one instant the border crossed the native peoples of the land. A popular refrain states: “We did not cross the border; the border crossed us!” Even today, Texas has an amusement park that is known as Six Flags Over Texas, for there have been six claims of sovereignty over this contested border space! It is for this reason that the people of the borderlands need

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documents, *papeles* we call them in Spanish, to legitimize our identity at the border checkpoints.”³

The border between the U.S. and Mexico remains highly contested territory. In 1846 President Polk initiated the immoral war of aggression against Mexico for the right to claim the border space, a war that continues through militarized occupation and the sanctioned policy of incarceration and deportation. Today we experience the war as the open wound created by the iron slats of the wall that tear through the sacred soil of our ancestors, a rich soil that has given agricultural life to more than two nations and is watered by a shared river that nourishes countless species of environmental life that also migrate between our two countries. That sacred riverbed—and thus the southern border of Texas—is constantly shifting, just as today the political winds of deportation migrate south to round up and deport those who enter outside the border ports of entry. Every country needs to have secure borders, granted, but my conscience asks, at what cost to human dignity?

I was born in this borderland. My Lutheran Christian identity was forged and shaped in this crucible we call *La Frontera*, a word that captures the frontier aspect of an expansionist and violent history enforced by the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. This space was also the uncharted territory of missionaries, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, who felt called and compelled to evangelize and minister to the native peoples of the third country. This ancient, multilayered, and conflictive third space is where the sacramental and missional church intersected with my family. On Palm Sunday of 1954, I was baptized by Pastor Holger Nielsen, an immigrant from Denmark. Like many immigrants from Europe, he along with his mother and siblings were processed at Ellis Island on their way to a farm in Iowa. As Stephen Bouman, former bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod of the ELCA, and Ralston Deffenbaugh, former president of what used to be known as the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) indicate in their book, *They Are Us, Lutherans and Immigration*, we are after all a nation of immigrants and the church reflects this immigrant history.⁴

1. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera, The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 25–26.

2. Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You, Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 16, 51, 97–98, 284.

3. The border checkpoints are located within ninety miles from the U.S.–Mexico border and throughout the 1900-mile border with Mexico.

4. Stephen Bouman and Ralston Deffenbaugh, *They Are Us*,

The borderland church locates its scriptural roots in the history of the Hebrew people and identifies with their experience of exile and diaspora. As Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner reminds us, in the Hebrew canon one will hear thirty-six admonitions to care for the sojourner, for the Hebrews were once aliens in Egypt.⁵ Anchored in this history of sojourners, the borderland church relives her immigrant past and present with every proclamation of the Gospel. In November of 2024, I recalled our immigrant history and proclaimed it at the centennial celebration of the church of my baptism, St. John Lutheran in San Juan, Texas. St. John was founded by German immigrants who migrated to the borderlands to cultivate the rich land that was watered by the Rio Bravo through a system of canals.

The Mellenbruch family ministered to the health care needs of their Spanish-speaking neighbors during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918.⁶ Members of this family were present at the Centennial celebration. I was baptized, confirmed, ordained as a Lutheran pastor of the ELCA, and installed as a professor of contextual theology in that hallowed parish, the oldest Latiné or Hispanic Lutheran Church of the ELCA in the continental United States. True to her immigrant history, the church now serves the German and Scandinavian descendants of the Midwestern settlement project who migrated to the borderlands. Together, we serve the needs of the peoples located on both sides of the U.S. - Mexico border. The church advocates for immigrant justice by intensive trainings at the border as part of Project Radical Hospitality, a ministry of service of the Southwestern Texas Synodical Women of the ELCA. Our current vicar is an immigrant from El Salvador who is a candidate for the ordained ministry in the ELCA. Our Synodically Authorized Minister, or SAM as we call them in the ELCA, is the daughter of Norwegian and Swedish parents from Minnesota. Together, they make a great team proclaiming the Gospel in two languages every Sunday.

Ethical and theological reflection

Before I proceed with ethical and theological reflections concerning the notion and practice of love of the sojourner neighbor, I have a confession to make. I am a graduate of the University of Texas Law School, and I practiced law in south Texas for several years before discerning the call to attend seminary. I confess that I now practice law and gospel as part of my Lutheran heritage. I served in private practice in Brownsville, Texas, on the border with Matamoros, Mexico, as well as an assistant district attorney serving the public welfare, so I am well acquainted with both civil and criminal law and procedure. I have written appellate briefs to the thirteenth court of appeals and understand that laws can be challenged, refuted, reinterpreted, and appealed to with judicial

Lutherans and Immigration (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 25-53.

5. Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, *The Social Justice Torah Commentary*, ed. Rabbi Barry Block (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2021), 339-344.

6. See *The Roots and Dynamics of Lutheran Hispanic Ministry in Texas*, ed. T. Michael Mackey (LSPS: 1989).

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Recently, I taught a seminar at my church titled: “Rites and Rights.” I got this idea from my first seminary class. I attended the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest in Austin and the professor of liturgics posted a sign in the classroom that stated: “Know your rites!” That phrase stayed with me through the years, given that I had practiced law as an attorney, and I understood the concept of knowing your rights. It occurred to me that given the recent executive orders of the President of the United States that were disrupting the constitutional order and legislative process, I felt compelled to teach about our baptismal rite and duties that flow from this sacrament, and the Constitutional rights that guarantee unalienable rights and freedoms including the freedom to worship and to practice our faith traditions without government overreach. I referred to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, a statement that resulted from the mass deportations and incarceration of Jewish and other peoples from various nations and the violation of their human dignity during World War II. The United Nations sponsored the Universal Declaration of Human Rights including the United States.

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Christ and to strive for peace and justice in all the world.”⁷ It is also my baptismal duty to resist and renounce all forces of evil, the devil and all his empty promises.⁸ This language of service and resistance to human degradation is a baptismal confessional creed. For Jesus it would be a compelling interest.

In preparing for this presentation, I revisited the U.S. history of immigration, and all the laws and acts to either encourage settlement by Europeans or to discourage settlement by Asians and others.⁹ You may have heard of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 which was formulated to deport Chinese immigrants when their labor was no longer required and to prevent any further immigration from China. Immigration to the U.S. has always been a mixed bag of push and pull economic factors requiring the labor of *brazos* followed by expulsion when the sojourners were perceived as a threat to local labor wages or local culture. The Latiné population of the borderlands has been repeatedly subjected to deportations throughout our history, from the Mexican Repatriation Act during the Great Depression of both citizens and non-citizens, to Operation Wetback of the 1950s. The *Mojados*, or Wetbacks, a derogatory term, were once the Irish, the Poles, and the Germans. Currently, in the Rio Grande Valley we are seeing Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers known as ICE agents raiding businesses and deporting individuals without *papeles*. These raids cause moral outrage for people of faith and informed conscience who see this federal abuse of power as immoral and unconstitutional as it violates the legal standard of due process of law and the Fourth Amendment right to be free of search and seizure without probable cause. When these are violated, the community loses the confidence of rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States such as the right to counsel and the freedom to worship without government interference.

Scripture contains many references to the experience of the immigrant Hebrews. The Spanish translation of the Hebrew term *ger* for alien is *forastero*, or sojourner, my preferred term for the immigrant. Abraham and Sarah left their country for Canaan and during the famine sojourned in Egypt (Gen 12:1-20). Joseph was the victim of human trafficking and found justice in Egypt after

suffering various trials (Gen 37-45).¹⁰ The narrative that I often used when I taught the subject of migration in class was the narrative of the Holy Family who fled the death squads of King Herod for Egypt (Matt 2:13-23). I visited the Holy Land as a seminary student and traveled to Cairo by bus over the desert sands of Gaza because I wanted to see with my own eyes what that journey must have been like for Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus. Joseph was a carpenter who probably found work in Alexandria to support his family. We can only surmise. His accent would have given him away as a sojourner in Egypt.

The memory of the sojourn in Egypt is annually recalled by the Jewish community in the seder meal of the annual Passover ritual. The historical memory serves to remind the Jewish community of their exilic past. Rabbi Jonah Von Pesner passionately reminded the Jewish community of this traditional narrative at a lecture I attended at Chautauqua Institution in New York several years ago. He addressed the community with these words from the book of Leviticus: “When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Lev 19:33-34). A strong social justice advocate, Rabbi Von Pesner was in route to Tornillo, Texas, to protest the family separation and detention of children during the first Trump administration.

I offer some ethical and theological reflections on our duty to our sojourner neighbor. When I taught Lutheran ethics at the seminary in Austin, my syllabus contained this initial question: What ought I to do? That is to say, what is my duty to my neighbor within the context of the Third Space borderlands? Another way of asking the question is: What does the love of God require? As a people of faith, we confess that God is love and the love of God in Jesus Christ compels us to love our neighbors as we have been loved and grasped by baptismal grace. This is a claim that I share with all people of faith whom I encounter on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border or anywhere in the world. Baptismal grace knows no boundaries and makes no distinctions among people. Our ethical duty to love and serve our sojourner neighbor naturally crosses borders and boundaries in a seamless web of life-giving grace. This grace compels us to practice a transnational ethical duty to see the

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7. *Evangelical Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 237.

8. *Evangelical Lutheran Book of Worship*, 235.

9. See, for example, the U.S. Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924.

10. See, “Joseph’s Journey from Forced Migration to Redemption: A Model for Immigration Justice” in *The Social Justice Torah Commentary*, ed. Barry H. Block, 65-69.

image and likeness of God in the sojourner and to see that image mirrored back in the relational encounter of service, friendship, advocacy, and the ministry of *acompañamiento*. Accompaniment is what Jesus would do. It was the praxis of his ministry with his disciples. It was his compelling interest.

Accompaniment is a missional relational ministry that was developed by Dr. Rafael Malpica during his leadership as the executive director of Global Mission of the ELCA. It is a ministry of accompanying partner churches throughout the world. This ministry takes the form of advocacy for the human right to migrate without the fear of violence whether as native citizens in contested third spaces or as recently arrived immigrants seeking asylum claims and protection from violence in their countries of origin. In teaching my recent seminar on sacramental rites and civil rights I appealed to the United Nations Human Rights Charter of 1945 that established fundamental human rights provisions and affirmed the dignity and worth of the human person. It committed all member states to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to national origin, race, sex, language, or religion. I noted that what is often hidden in the migration stories of our global neighbors are the global economic forces that compel sojourners to migrate, as well as climactic disruptions and the violation of their human rights in their countries of origin.

The truth is, the sojourner neighbor who arrives at the southern border is daily maligned, dehumanized, and demonized as “illegal aliens, criminals, and rapists” by the powerful political rhetoric that drives the news media. Language is a source of power and those who wield it carelessly affect the lives of countless displaced peoples. Language is also a symbol by which native and displaced peoples construct their theological identity in response to the violence of power differentials, just as the ancient Hebrews used their theological language to refute the xenophobia of their oppressor during their exile in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Theological language proclaimed in our pulpits every Sunday serves to refute the forces that dehumanize the displaced sojourner.¹¹ We, the trained theologians and public speakers, are the ones who must speak up for them, love them, and care for them as if they were Jesus himself.

Martin Luther has much to say about our obligation to the neighbor throughout his works. In the explanation of the 5th, 7th, 8th and 9th commandments in both the Small and Large Catechisms, Luther instructs the faithful of their duty to serve and love the neighbor (sojourner) as one would love God. In “The Freedom of a Christian,” Luther writes, “Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we

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may be truly Christians.”¹²

In his advice for Christians in general, Brother Martin writes that “the commandments are summed up in this sentence, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Rom 13:9). He adds, “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” [amended for gender inclusive language] (1 Tim 2:1).¹³ Today, we include prayers in worship for all people regardless of their sojourner status, gender claims, ethnic identity, and transnational border crossings, and we make supplications for those fleeing the violence of their native countries who seek asylum and refugee protection in this country. We especially pray for those held in cages or in detention centers who are being deported on late night flights out of sight of anyone.

This perspective of care for the sojourner is shared by our Roman Catholic neighbors who practice a ministry of accompaniment through the Catholic Charities Center in McAllen. Sister Norma Pimentel is a renown vocal advocate for the human rights and human dignity of the sojourner in south Texas. I know Sister Norma. I have visited with her about her experience. She has been maligned by the Attorney General of Texas who has claimed that she has “harbored illegal aliens” in her ministry of providing food and clothing and transportation aid to sojourners in transit to other cities. These sojourners are in fact processed at the border and delivered to the center by the border patrol. She remains firm in her social justice convictions and ministry of care of her faith tradition. Recently, Pope Francis mirrored her concern in a pastoral letter to the bishops of the country reminding them of their duty to care for the sojourner among us.¹⁴

In this militarized *frontera*, love of neighbor requires advocacy for the unnamed asylum seeker whom we see daily on our media screens. While living in Austin, I would take my students to meet

11. Javier Alanis, “Dignity for the Foreigner: A Study of the Imago Dei from a Lutheran Hispanic/Latino Perspective” (Ph.D. diss., The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2002), 4-10.

12. Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” *Luther’s Works*, 31:367.

13. Martin Luther, *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 356.

14. Francis, Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops of the United States of America, 10 February 2025.

them at a home for displaced migrants. We would hear their stories of migration through the Darien Gap—a sixty-mile stretch of rainforest that connects Central and South America. Every year I took my students to the border to see the river and feel the wall, to hear the voices of pastoral agents and the sojourners under their care, and to pray with them as we heard their heart-wrenching stories. When we visited El Paso, Texas, we visited the Anunciacion House shelter for migrants that was sued by the Attorney General of Texas for assisting sojourners. We also crossed over into Ciudad Juarez to provide food and clothing, and to worship and pray with the sojourners at a shelter provided by local caregivers. It was my pastoral, ethical, and missional duty to accompany these students who were preparing to be pastoral agents throughout the borderlands of the country.

At this point, you may be wondering, where does the observance of the civil law fit into this ethical framework of caring for the sojourner as a missional and pastoral concern? You may be asking, what about the separation of church and state. This is how I answer those questions as one who practiced law in south Texas and served the wholesome and widespread good, to quote my colleague and ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda.¹⁵ As a former attorney, I experience the Judaic law and gospel of the Christian tradition in tension with the civil and criminal law of the state. When I was licensed to practice law in south Texas, I made an oath to uphold the Constitution of the state of Texas and the United States of America. However, when I was ordained as a pastor of the ELCA, I took an oath to uphold the Confessions of the Lutheran Church and the historic creeds of the universal church. I hold these two oaths and obligations in tension with each other. When there is potential conflict, I scrutinize both the scriptures and the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. This is especially true today when the right to worship freely is under threat of overreach and violation by ICE agents looking to detain and deport sojourners who may worship with us.

Summary

- The love of God and neighbor requires a missional and ethical duty of care for the sojourner in a way that transcends national borders. Baptismal grace defies human constructs such as a wall of iron slats that separates peoples and families from each other in the name of safety, greatness, or national sovereignty. I call this duty a borderland missional ethics of care *sin fronteras*, missional ethics without border constructs.
- As an ethical duty of care, the people of God are called to scrutinize border constructs and sojourner care by an ethic of justice concern and advocacy for native and sojourner neighbors who are dehumanized and demonized as “illegal aliens” by the powerful rhetoric of the empire for the purpose of political gain.
- As baptized citizens of the reign of God, we are called to prac-

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tice sojourner love by intentionally entering the third spaces of our borderlands to see with the optic of Christian *caritas* or love of neighbor and respond with the agency of advocacy.

- We are called to enter and inhabit these third spaces to serve, accompany, listen, advocate, and befriend the loveless sojourner whose human dignity is violated.
- We are called to be bridge crossers who turn the iron slat walls of separation into tables of mercy and radical hospitality.¹⁶
- We are called to join hands with people of all traditions and goodwill, of all ethnic and national origins to promote justice for our neighbors in the prophetic tradition of Micah 6:8.
- We are called to practice radical hospitality (asylum) without which many cannot exist in a foreign land. Hospitality is a human right and obligation just as it was for our biblical ancestors who sojourned in the wilderness and for whom hospitality was a matter of life or death. Asylum and refugee protection laws are codified and honored by international law. When these laws are violated, then peaceful non-violent protest is a reasonable theological method for responding to government overreach.
- We are called to question critically unjust practices in our communities such as invasion of public and worship spaces, and to practice justice agency for love of the sojourner neighbor.
- We are called to inhabit the intersection of the spiritual and civil realms of governance for the just ordering of society and to live within this tension in a way that promotes critical thinking skills that lead to new awareness, that is, consciousness-raising or *concientización* of the faithful for the sake of love of the sojourner neighbor.

15. See Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church, For the Life of the World*, (Augsburg Fortress: 2004).

16. See, for example, *Project Radical Hospitality*, Women of the ELCA, Southwestern Texas Synod, 2024.

- We are called to affirm human dignity in all people created in the image and likeness of God who inhabit the contested third spaces of our vocations and ministries.
- We are called to remember that world mission begins at home in the way we treat our sojourners and advocate for their defense in the face of unjust treatment that devalues their human dignity.¹⁷

Missional markers

- Mission is about our baptismal creed and covenant “to serve ALL people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.”¹⁸
- Mission is about knowing your sacramental rites and civil rights as a responsible citizen of faith in a country that was founded on the principle of unalienable rights.
- Mission is about identifying our churches as a safe sanctuary, clearly identifying areas where federal ICE agents cannot violate the freedom of worship that is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.
- Mission is about equipping the saints with Bible studies that examine the history of the sojourner in a foreign land, such as exploring the Hebrew narratives of exile in Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, the narrative of Abraham and Sarah who leave their native land, and Joseph’s Journey from forced migration to redemption.¹⁹
- Mission is about reading the Bible in one hand while reading the Constitution of the United States in the other.
- Mission is about knowing our history of immigration to a land known as Turtle Island by native peoples and recalling that the Pilgrims were saved from starvation by a hospitable native people who, with *brazos*, taught them agricultural methods.²⁰
- Mission is about peaceful protest outside detention centers as a theological method to protest the unjust incarceration of asylum seekers, much like the peaceful non-violent protest marches for civil rights that made Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. effective in the 1960s, and that was modeled by Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry when he visited a detention center in Texas several years ago.
- Mission is about attending the legislative sessions of our state legislatures to question unjust bills before the legislature, visiting with state legislators in their offices, and making the church visibly present to show concern and advocacy at the highest level of our government.

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- Mission is about exercising our First Amendment right of Free Speech on behalf of the sojourners in our communities and teaching the church that the Fourth Amendment guarantees freedom from detention without probable cause.
- Mission is about making the sojourner feel welcome in our sacred spaces without questioning their immigration status in the community.
- Mission is about knowing the name of your global neighbor.
- Mission is about naming the nature of injustice, something I learned as a doctoral student at LSTC, and something I taught my students for over twenty years. Justice begins by naming those things that oppose the values of the kin-dom of God on earth.²¹
- Mission is about not being afraid to name and proclaim the difficult truths of our sojourner’s condition even if by naming we confront and discomfort the ideological stances of the church that is at times in direct opposition to the confessions and creeds of the Church catholic to serve ALL people and to strive for peace and justice in all the earth. Catechetical instruction on the Sacrament of Holy Baptism is a healthy spiritual practice for adult education and formation. The daily reminder of our baptism is a faithful spiritual practice as recommended by Dr. Martin Luther and as taught in the Sacrament of Baptism in the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church.²²
- Mission is about advocating for comprehensive immigration reform that will serve the people who seek asylum at our border while balancing that concern with the justifiable need for national security from criminal organizations involved in human trafficking.²³
- And Mission, in the end, is remembering that we must all care for, aid, and love those who sojourn among us. It is, after all, what Jesus did, what he would be doing today, right here, right now, every day, and especially, now!

17. Alanis, *Dignity for the Foreigner*, 1-17, 25-53.

18. *Evangelical Lutheran Book of Worship*, 237.

19. See, Block, ed., *The Social Justice Torah Commentary*, 65-70, and *Afterword*, 339-344.

20. See, “Of Plymouth Plantation” in *The Journal of William Bradford*, 52, at plimoth.org

21. See, for example, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church*, 69-73.

22. See, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second Edition, (United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 312-325.

23. See, for example, “Lutherans Seek Comprehensive Immigration Reform” in *ELCA News* (elca.org/news), 2005.