



Gabby and her husband embrace at Hugs Not Walls event.

Migrants on the Southern Border

BY BETH GRIFFIN

Though immigration lies at the center of a heated national debate in Washington, DC, two independent organizations supported by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) are working with people in the dioceses of El Paso, Texas, and Las Cruces, New Mexico, to address the issue in a just, dignified, and Christian way.

Since 1998 the Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR) has organized and mobilized border residents to defend and promote their human and civil rights by engaging respectfully with community and law enforcement groups. Hope Border Institute (HBI) is another grassroots organization

that began in 2015 as an initiative of several CCHD-funded groups and local clergy to help organize people in the border communities. It builds on Catholic social teaching and uses an *encuentro* (or encounter) model to build relationships, develop consensus, and pursue institutional change in favor of justice.

With their deep understanding of the local situations and persistent determination to reflect Catholic social teaching, both BNHR and HBI are making a positive difference in the lives of the people they serve. This article profiles several participants.

Gabriela, 34, came to Texas as a teenager with her mother and sister, fleeing deadly violence and abject poverty in her Mexican hometown. As an undocumented student, Gabriela says she was mocked by teachers who used racial epithets and intimidated by neighbors who threatened to report her to immigration officials. She and her high-school sweetheart have three children who are U.S. citizens. The youngest has a congenital heart defect for which surgery is scheduled. Gabriela and her family have experienced firsthand the ruptures caused by deportation—including the deportation of her husband back to Mexico.

Gabriela worked for a time as a cleaner. She was surprised to hear a BNHR speaker at Sunday Mass say that undocumented immigrants have rights. “My husband didn’t

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Dear Friends,

Like many of you, I am heartbroken and appalled by the separation of children from their families at our southern border crossings this year. These actions have focused national attention on the ongoing challenges that confront migrants and the communities where they live.

From a distance the situation may seem abstract. But at the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), our affected brothers and sisters and these issues are our daily concerns. We have provided grant funds to two well-respected independent organizations—the Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR) and the Hope Border Institute (HBI)—which work closely with our Catholic colleagues in the dioceses of El Paso, Texas, and Las Cruces, New Mexico. You may recall reading about them in these pages. Though each has a slightly different focus, both work to support human dignity, seek justice, and advocate for systemic change.

BNHR has become the voice of immigrants as it helps families and individuals understand their human and constitutional rights. It also engages enforcement agencies in dialogue to ensure that immigrants and migrants are treated humanely and that border enforcers operate with accountability and oversight. BNHR works across dioceses and with bipartisan support to promote legislative initiatives that reflect the reality of life at the border.

HBI builds on Catholic social teaching and provides detailed research to help partner organizations develop long-term, systemic approaches to the complex issues of immigration.

In this newsletter we hear the voices of people at the border. Their lives have been impacted by immigration decisions made initially by their parents—and by policies enacted at a distance and enforced locally. These people have also been lifted up by the organizations I've described. They are truly the people at the margins whom Pope Francis calls us to serve.

This message is especially timely, because "Working on the Margins" is the theme of this year's CCHD national collection. Through its compassionate, Gospel-driven response to immigrants and migrants in need, CCHD helps to ensure that the lives and stories of these individuals are treated with respect and not lost in the enormity of the national immigration debate.

In this issue we also recognize the contributions of young people who use their creativity to depict Catholic social teaching in action in our 2018 Creating on the Margins Youth Art Contest. Students in grades 7 through 12 were invited to create multimedia artworks interpreting the theme of the hardships facing migrants and refugees. Congratulations to all the winners!

Thank you for your ongoing generosity and commitment to support our efforts to break the cycle of poverty in the United States.

Sincerely,

RALPH McCLOUD

Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development

WHAT IS CCHD?



Through the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholics and friends of CCHD across the country help poor and low-income Americans to help themselves and their communities out of poverty.

Since 1970, the CCHD has contributed over \$300 million to more than 8,000 low-income led, community-based projects that strengthen families, create jobs, build affordable housing, fight crime, and improve schools and neighborhoods. CCHD requires that projects develop community leadership and participation so that their solutions to poverty will be long-lasting and effective, and so that CCHD's investment in people will help break the cycle of poverty. CCHD also educates Catholics about the causes of poverty and seeks to build solidarity between impoverished and affluent persons.



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Gabby from BNHR speaks at a rally in support of immigration reform with a path to citizenship.



Gabby receives volunteer community award from Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center.



Gabby visits with her family at Hugs Not Walls event at the Rio Grande.

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believe it. If we didn't have rights in our home country, how could we have them here?" she recalls. She became a volunteer human rights promoter with BNHR in 2008. When President Barack Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy in 2012, she says, she was "overwhelmed with joy" and became a salaried BNHR employee.

Today, Gabriela says, "The future looks blurry." She had met all the DACA criteria and was working her way through the legal immigration process when she was notified in 2017 that she no longer qualified and had to return her work permit. "I had been giving presentations to other people, telling them about their rights, and I couldn't get any answers about my own case," she says.

On the advice of her attorney, Gabriela turned herself in as a domiciled alien and was harassed during her detention. When she was subsequently released, she was told she could renew her work permit. "I believe I was attacked because I was an activist for the [BNHR] organization," she says.

Gabriela's children visit their father in Mexico regularly. She was able to meet him in the middle of the Rio Grande River during a BNHR "Hugs Not Walls" reunion event, but the family remains apart.

"We're not bad people. We have dreams, we love our kids, we work, we pay taxes. We are the new immigrants coming to this country to better our lives," she says.

"We don't want to get ahead of the line—there is no line. There is a broken system that is hurting families. Not everyone can wait in their home country for 20 years. If I waited, I'd be dead by now."

Nayeli, now 34, crossed the Rio Grande on a raft with her mother to see relatives in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Although she is certain her mother did not intend to migrate permanently, they ended up staying for several years. During that time her father, a visa holder, visited occasionally.

With the help of a first-time midwife, Nayeli's mother gave birth in a borrowed house to Nayeli's younger sister—who had a cleft palate. A woman the family knew from church brought them to a hospital for treatment, where officials accused Nayeli's mother of crossing the border with the infant.

"The church lady was sent by God," Nayeli recalls. "She located the midwife, and they proved my little sister was born here." Nonetheless, Nayeli's mother was unemployed and virtually homeless. She was repeatedly denied Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) aid for the baby. Nayeli's mother ultimately took a live-in babysitting job, caring for six children in exchange for lodging.

That job ended when her mother became pregnant again, Nayeli says, and the small family ended up in a homeless shelter. "I couldn't understand why she couldn't provide a home for us or why I had to go to school with torn shoes," Nayeli recalls.

Nayeli herself became pregnant as a senior in high school. She dropped out, but subsequently married and finished school. She now has three children. Her first husband was unfaithful. Her second husband, a U.S. citizen, was an abusive drug addict who threatened to report her to immigration officials, she says. When her second husband ran over Nayeli with a car and threatened to kill her with a screwdriver, she called the police.

"When they got there, I panicked and thought they would detain me and I would not see my kids again. But my four-year-old told them what she saw, and my husband was arrested for assault and battery. We went to a women's shelter," she says.

Nayeli had DACA status and is now pursuing a residency visa under the Violence Against Women Act. She works as a home health aide for a 94-year-old Holocaust survivor and volunteers with BNHR. "I'm very grateful to BNHR for opening my eyes and giving us a safety net. If I understood my rights earlier, I wouldn't have lived in fear for so many years," she says.

As a new high school graduate, Sebastian wanted to volunteer in an organization dedicated to community change. He found his place at HBI's Border Leaders Academy, a leadership development program that identifies and responds to local needs and culture without duplicating the efforts of others.

"I knew I had a mission to serve," he says, "but at the Leaders Academy, I found the connection between my faith and my call to work for social justice."

Sebastian participated in the first Border Leaders Academy in 2017 and has served as a facilitator for two more sessions of the academy. "I make presentations on how Catholic social teaching applies to immigration," he explains.

Sebastian joined his siblings in El Paso, Texas, seven years ago, migrating from their home state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Their parents remain in Mexico. "Immigrants don't have a voice, but as a Catholic I am called. I know God wants something good from me," he says.

The HBI volunteer attends community college and works part-time in a mechanic shop. "We're helping people come together to learn about issues in the community and participate to bring change." 🌱

Congratulations, Lana!

Each year the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) hosts the Creating on the Margins Youth Art Contest to engage students in grades 7-12 by encouraging them to learn about poverty in the United States, its root causes, and faith-inspired efforts to address poverty. Students become educators themselves as they use their creativity to communicate what they have learned to others in their community.

This year, CCHD was honored to name Lana Chalfoun, an 7th grader from Grand Rapids MI, the grand prize winner for her song, "Bring Them Home." About her work Lana said, "My song talks about how we need to realize that [migrants and refugees] are suffering, that they have families they need to take care of, and that we need to help them. We need to bring them home."

Visit www.USCCB.org/YouthContest Gallery of Winners. 📍



Bring Them Home

They don't have the money,
To give them what they need.
They don't have the family,
To help them to succeed.
They are tired and hungry,
Need something to eat.
They're one child of many,
Living on the streets.

Cause they're sitting outside, in the cold,
With no one there to hold them close.
Don't know when they'll eat again,
Praying that the rain will end.
Woahh, woahh, woahh, oh, oh

We take things for granted,
Laying in our beds,
When there are children out there,
Not even being fed.
I just can't imagine,
What it must be like,
Not knowing where you're going,
Or where you'll spend the night.

Cause they're sitting outside, in the cold,
With no one there to hold them close.
Don't know when they'll eat again,
Praying that the rain will end.
Woahh, woahh, woahh, oh, oh

They've traveled long and far,
To get to where they are,
Strangers to this land,
Until we lend a hand.
They've traveled long and far,
To get to where they are,
They are all alone,
Until we bring them home.
Bring them home...
Bring them home...
Bring them home...
Bring them home...

Cause they're sitting outside, in the cold,
With no one there to hold them close.
Don't know when they'll eat again,
Praying that the rain will end.
Sitting outside, in the cold,
With no one there to hold them close.
Don't know when they'll eat again,
Praying that the rain will end.
Woahh, woahh, woahh, oh, oh
Woahh, woahh, woahh, oh, oh

They won't have a future,
Unless we lend a hand.
We can help each other,
We can be a friend.

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