

A PILGRIM CHURCH AT THE BORDER:
CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES—INVITED SESSION

Topic: A Pilgrim Church at the Border: Catholic Theological Responses
Convener: Kristin Heyer, Boston College
Moderator: Roberto Goizueta, Boston College
Presenters: Kristin Heyer, Boston College
Leo Guardado, University of Notre Dame
Tisha Rajendra, Loyola University Chicago

President-Elect Mary Hines invited this session to reflect upon the US-Mexico border's implications for Catholic theology in light of the convention's location in Albuquerque, NM. It began with an appreciation of this attentiveness to place and of the Board's statement condemning the executive order on migrants and refugees as "morally unjust and religiously dangerous."

In "Displacing Static Models: Border Realities and Catholic Theology," Kristin Heyer argued that contemporary border realities invite a shift from an approach that "welcomes strangers" to one that disrupts complicity in structural injustice and unmasks operative myths and motives. She underscored ways dominant narratives about border crossers reflected in damaging rhetoric and policies as well as responses that focus on hospitality alone similarly mask structural injustices harming migrants. She drew upon Roberto Goizueta's work on the function of frontier myths and idols of invulnerability to probe the depth and lure of contemporary exclusionary dynamics and a response befitting a resurrection people—one marked by encounter, risk, repentance, and solidarity. She concluded by calling for migrants' complex experiences to reshape some of the Catholic tradition's idealized conceptions and conventional pastoral postures, signaling examples in areas of family and sexual ethics, moral agency, ecclesiology, and pastoral practice. She framed the argument with the example of the binational Kino Border Initiative, whose approach has been marked by a posture of "reciprocal evangelization."

In his presentation on "Becoming Sanctuary: A Displaced Church for the Displaced," Leo Guardado suggested that the category of church as sanctuary can serve as a model for envisioning ways of understanding and becoming the church we already are—and are yet to be—in the world. He noted how sanctuary as practiced by borderland communities both in the 1980s and today invites us to historically concretize Vatican II's proclamation that the church is a sacrament in history. He outlined how becoming sanctuary is both gift and challenge for manifesting the church's salvific mission in the United States. First, if human displacement is overwhelmingly a universal sign of political violence and economic oppression, our inability to become a site of refuge for the displaced risks scandal, obscuring God's grace. Second, because displaced persons bear the wounds of the violence that forces them to flee, sanctuary places the church on the path of this traumatized *corpus verum*, of the real Body of Christ in history in whose healing we find our salvation. Lastly, through the practice of sanctuary, church communities become sites of the Spirit's sanctifying presence in their resistance of structures that promote death instead of life, sin instead of salvation.

Finally, Tisha Rajendra's "A Story of a Border: US Citizens, Mexican Migrants, and the Limits of Hospitality" argued that a just response to US-Mexican immigration

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depends on accurate narratives about migrants and their relationships to citizens. She first addressed the false narratives and their relationship to unjust structures, illuminating how false narratives undergird tacit and explicit support for the unjust structures that exploit migrants and lead to false conclusions about the responsibilities that US citizens have to migrants. She drew upon a Superbowl commercial to illuminate false narratives common in social and political discourse and their connection to unjust accounts of US citizen responsibilities: the heroic immigrant narrative, the home of the brave narrative, and the isolated immigrant narrative. She then proposed a more accurate narrative of the relationship between US citizens and Mexican migrants, drawing upon sociologies and histories of US-Mexican labor migration. She concluded by showing how this more accurate narrative might lead US citizens to consider that we might have the same responsibilities to Mexican migrants that we do to fellow citizens and to reject of accounts of responsibility that rely on benevolence and hospitality, rather than justice. In the discussion that followed, participants took up the status of the term “sanctuary” related to its ability to protect and its implications for Catholic university contexts. The group also considered the relationship between sanctuary practices and the moral frame of hospitality.

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