

Hard-line immigration policies have our Latino neighbors scared and traumatized

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I bet you didn't know that on any given day of the week you will find Latino families in South King County, gathering in one of our thrift stores to be educated, counseled and protected from a very cold world. Centro Rendu was born out of love for our immigrant Latino communities that suffer from daily exploitation, indifference and hostility. It is named after one of our founders, Sister Rosalie Rendu (a firebrand), a radical Daughter of Charity who gave her life in service to the powerless and taught the poor how to fight for their dignity.

Centro Rendu serves 1,000-plus individuals and families, both legal and undocumented, every year. We are a repository of human stories. Daily we witness the remnants of the effects of immigration in the behaviors we see in home visits and in our classrooms. We see families that experience untreated depression due to multiple losses of home, job, dignity and freedom. The severity of these losses over time can crush the human spirit. Every moment is survival, stalked by fear; mothers stay at home, living with acute anxiety of being detected and locked up, leaving their children to fend for themselves. Those who come to Centro Rendu often carry the weight of the world on their shoulders, displaying behaviors of trauma and disengagement with little or no trust.

Our years of experience serving and walking with Latino families have shown us that they want what all Americans hunger for, a job, a home and a family. Their desire for the American dream transcends the fear of going to jail. Giving up their freedom to have freedom, they are willing to risk it all.

With all due respect to the Trump administration, the initial statement, since revised, announcing a new round of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement deportations further strained the fabric of our society by placing a one-size-fits-all label on a diverse community that struggles to belong. Some who illicitly found their way into the United States came as babies themselves many years ago.

The human struggle with immigration is not new, and cities on the southern U.S. border are quite familiar with this human plight.

People migrate for a wide variety of reasons. Our borders must be secured and protected, and at the same time we must restrain ourselves from generalizing and demonizing. The term "illegal alien," as a political construct, is itself dehumanizing.

Our message to the community is St. Vincent de Paul has been thriving for 186 years, and our mission and commitment to society's most vulnerable will never be deterred.

One of our parents from Centro Rendu was recently leaving his apartment heading to work. His children saw him leaving from the balcony and as he reached the street he was surrounded by a number of men. The children witnessed their dad being held down, cuffed and driven away as a common criminal. The incident spread through the Latino community like wildfire, ratcheting up neighborhood anxiety.

Over and over children live with these stark images that result in profound sadness that seeps into their school lives, frequently showing in aggressive behavior or withdrawal. Wives and mothers of young children find themselves needing to go back to work overnight while older siblings make the choice between going to school and going to work.

These are the lives of families impacted by immigration.

The milieu of Centro Rendu is grounded on a small patch of earth in our St. Vincent de Paul stores that is known and frequented by Latinos. This is a sacred, safe place where all are welcomed and valued as equals. It is a space where Latinos who have been crushed to the margins can find kindness and respite.

We are one human family summoned to care for our brothers and sisters, and Centro Rendu stands committed to walking with and protecting Latinos at all cost.