

MORE THAN JUST TRAVELLING COMPANIONS

Ninemonths ago, I published some reflections on migration in Mexico and its neighboring countries. I referred to the work conducted by the Franciscans, with “The 72” migrant shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco and that of our friend, the Ursuline nun Adriana Méndez Peñate. Analyzing the situation of migrants and refugees leads to countless political, economic, social, demographic, humanitarian, psychological, religious and cultural interpretations. However, this time, I would like to focus on the people who interact with migrants and refugees during their early years of the adaptation process.



According to my French Jesuit friend, Antoine Paumard, “It took a woman from Afghanistan about three years to finally arrive in France. She had left her country, and then lived in Turkey and subsequently in Greece. However, her soul had never really arrived. It’s as if she were still in Afghanistan and in France, like a bridge that enabled her children to move to the European Union.” Indeed, the children are barely beginning to build their new lives, although on the other hand, she had to deprive herself of everything familiar to her and of the life she had already created in order to embark on a path of no return and begin a new, a journey whose constant has always been change.

With his characteristic humility, Antoine explains his work with the migrants, “We are their support; we accompany the refugees part of the way.” The Society of Jesus, like

Migrant or refugee?

People who leave their country of origin to settle somewhere else do so for many different reasons. There are those who migrate voluntarily in search of better social and economic opportunities, although there are also those who migrate because they have a genuine fear of being persecuted, or that their lives are in danger due to wars, violence, political beliefs, race, religion or social sector preferences.

many other organizations, contributes in different ways, such as organizing thousands of volunteers, like as families who offer their homes as temporary shelter for these families. Antoine makes an important point when he reflects on whether the so-called "migration crisis" would be quite different if there were greater willingness to receive them, and astutely speculates, **"Wouldn't that also be a hospitality crisis?"**

I also had the opportunity to talk with Paola Baglietto, in another geographic region, the United States. She is a high school teacher in a public school where 50 percent of her students are either Latin Americans or of Latin American origin. Her mission is to raise awareness in these young people regarding the importance of working hard in order to get ahead; showing them the potential opportunities offered by the United States to those who do their best and earn merit. "I love what I do!" Paola exclaims. "I help these young people to change their mentality and in many cases, that of their parents as well, so they don't just settle for receiving their high school diploma but can consider the possibility of going to college as well."

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic Service provided by the Society of Jesus. Its European headquarters assists refugees and other displaced persons in over 20 European countries. Their services include support to asylum seekers under arrest, legal advice to asylum seekers wishing to remain and to illegal immigrants. They also offer psychosocial assistance to people traumatized by persecution and their escape. In addition they serve as chaplains, both in the authorized refugee centers or shelters, as well as other enclosed or detention centers where they offer food and shelter to indigent immigrants.



Some of the people Paola works with are virtually trapped, because they cannot return to their country of origin. Some groups even decide to dissociate themselves from their Latin American identity because they feel they have to choose between that identity and that of the United States. "I help them understand that their biculturalism is actually a competitive asset and that some of them can even graduate from high school equipped with a two-year university degree, if they fulfill the requirements for this particular program," she adds.

For those young people who understand the vast range of possibilities that Paola proposes and who believe in the importance of doing the very best, they experience such a remarkable change that will exert positive effects for their future, for their families, their descendants and for the society to which they belong. Therefore, I venture to assert that the work of Paola, Antoine, Sister Adriana and the thousands of people who, in some way, touch the lives of a migrant or a refugee is of supreme importance and serves as an example that inspires us all to reach out and join them.