



Immigration Legal Services

Keeping Families Together Edition 2 May 2019

Why do we do what we do?

By Yer Vang, Catholic Charities' Director of Immigration Legal Services

In Iowa, the month of May holds mixed emotions for immigrants in our communities. May marks two unfortunate anniversaries that will leave a mark on our state's immigration history in a way that will not be forgotten. Eleven years ago on May 12, 2008, 400 lives were disrupted and families devastated by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid that took place in Postville. While that community continues to heal, last year on May 9th in Mount Pleasant, 32 families were devastated when ICE conducted another raid.



Now more than ever, our ministry to immigrants and refugees is needed in order to encourage them to come out of the shadows and not live in fear. Immigrants, regardless of their immigration status, have a right to seek legal options to determine whether they may qualify for a path to legal status. It is important to know that being physically present without proper documentation in the United States in itself is not a crime. Therefore, immigrants who do not have legal documentation may still be eligible to apply for legal status under our immigration law. Our role at Catholic Charities is to help immigrant families understand and exercise their rights regardless of how scary and terrorizing those immigration policies may be enforced.

Our goal is to reunite and keep families together. Catholic Charities provides family-based and humanitarian immigration legal services. The most common immigration services we provide are to help individuals apply for green cards, citizenship, work-permits and spousal or immediate family member petitions. Some of our clients are citizens or legal permanent residents, who have been separated from their families for years. They need our help to reunify with their immediate family members and navigate the complex immigration system. Our services are extended to clients who would otherwise not be able to afford legal services due to socio-economic barriers. In order to help immigrants determine their legal options, consultations with an immigration attorney from Catholic Charities is provided at no charge. If a client is eligible for an immigration remedy and they become a client of Catholic Charities, they pay a fee commensurate to their income. In addition to our direct legal services, our program provides crucial legal education to parishes, communities and to immigrants about immigration law and rights.

Many of our clients have been forced to flee their country because of extreme poverty and violence. These parents and children are simply trying to survive and seek safety in the United States, to which they are entitled to do so under our immigration law. We are helping

the most vulnerable among us to seek permission to remain in the United States because many have been abused, are fleeing violence, belong to a persecuted class of people in their home country, or are young people who have been abandoned by their parents. Our legal ministry is to help facilitate welcoming the stranger so that our immigrant brothers and sisters can come out of the shadows and continue to build a community with us.

If you would like more information about our ministry or how to get involved, please contact our Immigration Legal Services office in Cedar Rapids at 319-364-7121.



Dream Come True

To say Joanne, a United States Citizen, missed her family in Liberia is an understatement. She ached to see her mother, to touch her. This is how the Catholic Charities' Immigration Legal Services team came to know Joanne. She needed help in order to make her dream come true.

Joanne hadn't seen her mother, Mary, for more than nine years. Many of us can't begin to imagine that kind of longing to see a

loved one. Joanne and Mary's case was what Catholic Charities, Director of Immigration Legal Services, Yer Vang calls, "a typical family reunification case."

Though typical, immigration cases often take time, in many cases a very long time. For Joanne and Mary it took two years. Mary now has Legal Permanent Residence in the United States and has a Green Card. She now resides with Joanne and her family.

The day this photo was taken, Joanne and Mary stopped by the Catholic Charities office in Cedar Rapids just to give Yer a huge hug for making their dream a reality. Though Mary is termed "elderly," she tells Yer in her best English, she is in good health and is so excited and eager to work here in the United States.

Did You Know... Immigrants Pay Taxes

Immigrants contribute more in taxes than they consume in public benefits.

Specifically, undocumented immigrants contribute between \$7-8 billion in social security funds annually. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) estimates that undocumented immigrants pay between \$9-11 billion in withheld payroll taxes annually (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2018). Undocumented immigrants keep the Social Security system more solvent because they pay into the system but are NOT eligible to collect benefits upon retiring.

By legalizing the undocumented workforce, we will bring these workers out of the shadow underground economy and increase social security and federal tax revenue. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that if the 2007 immigration reform bill had passed, legalizing 12 million undocumented immigrants, it would have generated \$48 billion in new federal revenue through 2008-2017.

[Sources: American Immigration Council, SEIU, Bipartisan Policy Center, Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP)]

In 2018, 94% of Immigration Legal Services clients reported more confidence in their ability to pursue school or employment



Path to Citizenship

During a recent Naturalization Ceremony held at the University of Northern Iowa, 125 individuals, ages 22-87, representing 6 continents and 43 countries, took the naturalization oath. Catholic Charities' client, Ursula Stickfort, was among two individuals represented from Germany.

"As many of these as I get to do, it never fails to choke me up", stated U.S. District Court Judge C.J. Williams. Feelings were mutual for Ursula's husband, Duane Stickfort, as he shared ***"This day is a day we have been praying for for so long. Now that it is***

finally here, we will continue to pray, but now our prayers will be for all the others like us." With loud applause and cheers in the background, Duane's wife, Ursula, had just been introduced as a United States citizen.

Ursula's journey to becoming a United States citizen was long and riddled with potholes, curves and speed bumps. Ursula first arrived in the United States twenty-five years ago with little more than a Green Card and her new husband (now ex-husband), an American GI she met in her homeland of Germany. Over the years, Ursula continued to renew her Green Card in order to have proof of her legal status in the U.S. During those years, Ursula made many attempts to become a citizen, though each time there seemed to be another roadblock. The process is difficult in and of itself, but Ursula also had medical issues that made the path seem impossible. Several times, well intentioned advocates would attempt to assist her with the petition process; however, these individuals were not attorneys nor knowledgeable of the complex immigration law. Ursula made several trips to Des Moines to meet with an Immigration Officer and each time, another roadblock. Her medical condition made passing the citizenship test very grim even though she paid the expensive federal immigration USCIS (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services) fee and attempted time and time again. Then there were the immigration forms...each time being told they weren't filled out correctly, information was missing, and so on. After several of these trips and many miles and dollars adding up, Ursula was finally informed that she actually qualified for a Waiver of Disability due to her medical condition. This waiver would eliminate the testing requirement of the citizenship process.

Ursula and her family are considered low income and had already spent as much as they had, even maxing out credit cards just to get to this point in their journey. It seemed to the Stickforts that they had come to a dead end, but decided to make one last attempt by reaching out to Catholic Charities. Ursula and her family met with Immigration Attorney, Miryam Antúnez De Mayolo, who took Ursula's case, correcting and supplementing prior filings, accompanying her to her interview with the USCIS in Des Moines, and guiding her through the last stretch of the long path that led to this day.

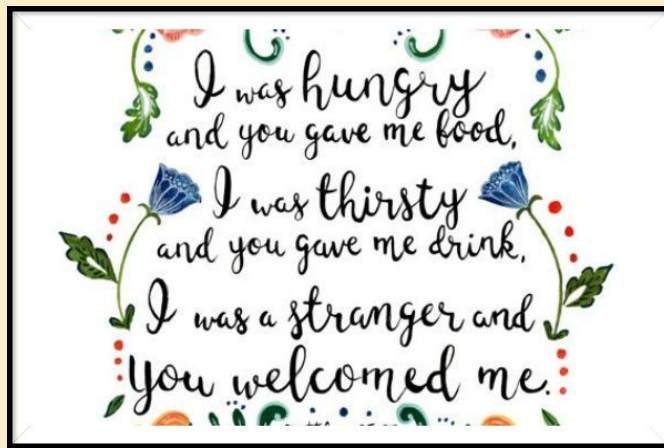


Ursula and Duane have two grown daughters and are now enjoying their newest family addition, their first grandchild. Duane expressed how grateful his family is for the help they received through Catholic Charities, but no words were needed to show his appreciation. This picture of him, with tears in his eyes, with daughter, Amanda, as Ursula was being introduced as a United States Citizen for the very first time says it all.

Faith in Action...Matthew 25

Guest Author, Sr. Mary McCauley, BVM

For most of us, if a person says to you "John 2" or "Mark 3," you may be a bit perplexed, but if someone says "Matthew 25," you know what they are referring to! Considering the immigration challenges of 2019, how do we faithfully respond to the call of Matthew 25? Gratefully in 2003, the US and Mexico Bishops offered guidelines regarding a country's immigration policy.



They first of all indicated that people have a fundamental right to economic, political, and social opportunity in their homelands. Secondly, they stated that when people cannot support themselves or their families in their homelands or be assured of safety, they have a right to migrate. The third guideline focused on borders. Here they stated that sovereign nations have a right to control their borders; and then added that those nations who are better able to protect and feed their residents are obligated to accommodate migration flows. Finally, they noted that all who flee violence and persecution should be offered special protection and respect at every step of the migrating process.

So where does that leave us today? It leaves us with the responsibility to be informed about our current immigration policies; to be aware of the challenges faced by our 2019 refugees and immigrants, and in light of the guidance given to us by our Church leaders to call for just, fair and comprehensive immigration reform. **It leaves us authentically living Matthew 25!**

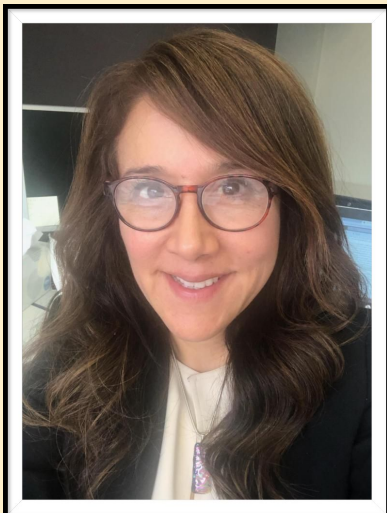


Educating Communities

Ry Meyer, Immigration Attorney, speaks to community members at the Immigration Resource Fair held in Dubuque on April 5, 2019. Catholic Charities partnered with the Presentation Lantern Center, a nonprofit organization that provides ESL instruction and help with preparing for the US

Naturalization Test, the Tri-State Hispanic Council and the Human Rights Department of the City of Dubuque to organize an Immigration Resource Fair at the Cathedral of St. Raphael.

One central feature of the fair was the "Know Your Rights" training session offered by Ry Meyer, who states "We all have inalienable human rights, regardless of our citizenship status," he said. "Citizens may know their rights, but immigrants may not be aware of the legal protections they have and the legal courses they can take." Catholic Charities and the other organizations that attended the fair are hoping to raise awareness. "It's up to all of us to get out into the community and let people know about the many kinds of help we offer," Meyer said.



Immigration Attorney Highlight: Miryam Antunez De Mayolo

Miryam Antúñez De Mayolo joined Catholic Charities only one year ago, but she has been practicing immigration law for twenty years, mostly in private practice in Cedar Falls, Waterloo and New York. Originally from Lima, Peru, Miryam is one of the few Iowa immigration attorneys who is fully bilingual in English and Spanish. She has dual law degrees: from the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos and from the University of Iowa College of Law. Raised in a close-knit family that valued intellectual pursuits and service to others, Miryam attributes her career path to her own experience leaving her home country and moving to a new country after her marriage to a U.S. citizen. Leaving

everything behind and starting anew, she claims, is still the hardest thing she has ever done.

In her lengthy legal career, Miryam has represented individuals and corporations before the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Department of Homeland Security, immigration courts around the country and the Eight Circuit Court of Appeals. Her current caseload includes unaccompanied children, asylum seekers, refugees and individuals seeking to be reunited with their spouses, parents or children. Being able to explain an already complex legal process in a client's own language is something that, she believes, people appreciate and are thankful for. Miryam is known for drawing and diagramming legal processes in fat black sharpie pens, while tailoring her explanation to the client's educational level until she is sure that the person in front of her understands his/her case and what the options are. ***"Making sure that the person who comes to see me has a full understanding of his or her case is extremely important to me. Each case is not a pile of papers but people's futures and sometimes, particularly in asylum cases, quite literally, people's lives. Every person has the right to know the full extent of his or her case at every step of the way, and to make informed decisions assisted by legal counsel."***

Miryam is a frequent speaker and author about immigration issues. She particularly enjoys debunking the myths about immigration and providing accurate facts to the public. Miryam lives in Cedar Falls and enjoys reading and traveling.



Myths vs. Facts

By Miryam Antúñez De Mayolo,
Catholic Charities' Immigration Attorney

IMMIGRATION MYTH: *Marrying a US Citizen makes the foreign spouse a US citizen.*

IMMIGRATION FACT: *Marrying a United States citizen does not give a foreign spouse the right to anything, except the right to apply for legal permanent resident status (what is commonly known as a "green card").*

The process can take between one and four years, depending on whether the foreign spouse is present in the United States and on whether she/he came with or without a visa. The law requires that the couple show that their marriage is a good faith marriage. Just being married for many years or having children together is not proof enough. I have had the good faith of clients' marriages questioned, despite them having children together ("how do I know it was not a one-night stand?" an immigration officer once told my clients in front of me). The law requires that the couple show that they have "comingled their assets," which sometimes is hard to prove if the parties have no or very little assets to begin with.

If the foreign spouse entered the United States without inspection, she/he usually has to go back to his or her home country to finish the application process, with no assurances or guarantees that he or she will be allowed back into the US to be re-united with family. If, at the time that the legal permanent residence is granted, the couple has been married for less than two years, then the foreign spouses is granted conditional permanent residence. The condition on which that status is predicated is that the couple stay married for two years after obtaining permanent residence. Ninety days before the second anniversary of the foreign spouse becoming a permanent resident, the couple needs to file a joint petition, asking that the conditions be lifted, having to prove good faith of their marriage again, through financial documentation and sworn affidavits. A permanent resident married to a U.S. citizen can only apply to become a U.S. citizen after accruing three years as a legal permanent resident and taking and passing a language, civics and history test. Being married to a U.S. citizen does not necessarily protect people from deportation nor removal from the United State; only becoming a US citizen can one be assured protection from deportation.

Community Partner Highlight:



For over 120 years, Waypoint (formerly YWCA) has existed as a vital community resource for individuals in crisis. In the early days, women who migrated to the city for employment turned to Waypoint for support. Over the years, Waypoint's services have evolved to meet the ever-changing needs of area women, children, and families.



Today, Waypoint offers a variety of proactive services and resources for those experiencing homelessness, poverty, or domestic violence. Waypoint's headquarters is located at 318 5th St. SE, Cedar Rapids, and covers a wide span of Northeastern Iowa. The Domestic Violence Victim Services are present in seven counties including Benton, Black Hawk, Buchanan, Delaware, Dubuque, Jones and Linn; however, services are also provided to families and individuals outside of these counties.

Catholic Charities partners with Waypoint in serving immigrant survivors of domestic violence. Immigration attorneys Yer Vang and Dee Patters provided a training to Waypoint staff this month (pictured left). According to Nelly Hill, Director of the Domestic Violence Program, ***"This training was incredibly helpful. It is very apparent that both Dee and Yer care deeply about the work they do! Advocate's increased their knowledge surrounding the immigration system and***

learned new ways to advocate on behalf of immigrant survivors. We look forward to our increasing our collaboration to support survivors in our community!"

Interested in learning more?

Please click here to visit our Immigration Legal Services website page or
Click here to donate to Catholic Charities.

