

## **Reflection for the Bold Action Immigrants and Refugee Update**

### **Sr. Carolyn Pozarich CPPS**

My father was an immigrant. He learned English when he came to the USA. I didn't even know he had an accent. Before I went to the convent, we decided I should get a driver's license, so we went to the local park. I began driving around. A police officer pulled us over. He said we could not practice driving in a park. My father got really excited. He had never been stopped by the police. He said, "She go to be nurse, she go to be nurse." He meant that I was going to be a nun, but the word didn't come to him.

I live in St. Louis County. Our neighbors are mostly Bosnian, with a smattering of Syrians and persons from the Dominican Republic. Sometimes we help them get their children into school. Sometimes they help us, help us get our car unstuck from the snow, or send us some of their delicious national foods.

In 1999, I began teaching at St. Cecilia School in St. Louis. I figured I could put my Spanish language to work. Some of the children were Mexican, and their parents were first learning the English language. Language is intricate, and English is complicated if you only speak Spanish, Chinese, or Burmese. You can't get anything at McDonald's if you can't say what you want to order. Parents take a young child with them to the doctor to interpret for them. There is no privacy there. My first year's teaching at St. Cecilia School was also the first year for the Vargas family. They were from Mexico, and they had five children. Lupita would be the first to enter school. Communication between teachers and parents was difficult, so I helped by interpreting. Sometimes the teachers would say, "It's no use sending a note home; they don't read it anyway." However, if the note is written in Spanish, Mexican parents do want to read the message.

Sometimes students were insecure about talking to their teacher. One day, while interpreting at a parent-teacher conference, the parents said that their son told them another boy was taking their son's lunch and throwing it away. He had gone several days without lunch. When I interpreted this, the teacher was appalled. She had no idea this was happening, and she took action.

A number of the student's dads earned a living by doing gardening. It was a living and didn't depend on their skill with the English language. Not everyone considered gardening an impressive job. A group of St. Cecilia seventh graders was learning to play basketball. They worked hard, and, after a while, they were getting pretty good. They were to play in a final championship game. Their opponents, from a wealthier school, were losing, but they were not about to lose to the Mexican kids. They began to chant, "Come to my house, work on my garden!" Instead of being insulted, the boys from St. Cecilia dug in. They won the championship.

After many years of classroom teaching, I began to teach English in the English Tutoring Project. I have taught children from St. Cecilia, Holy Trinity in St. Ann, St. Frances Cabrini, Marian Middle School, and Holy Cross Academy at Our Lady of Perpetual Help site. I teach children from China and Mexico. The goal is to improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in English. The students want to learn the language, and, slowly, it's happening.

**Reflection questions:**

Sr. Carolyn grew up in an immigrant family and demonstrates an empathetic understanding of her students and their families. What can you identify in your background that allows you to be empathetic with others, especially immigrants and Refugees?

Have you ever been in a situation where people around you did not understand what you were trying to say? What emotions did you experience? How does the ability to express oneself well relate to a person's self-image and even safety?