

Critical Concerns in Focus: Immigration

Mike Poulin; Institute Justice Team

(Feb. 2026) — As it has for decades, the Mercy Community continues to stand in solidarity with and minister to immigrants and immigrant communities, including being present at recent protests and demonstrations.

Mercy's migrant ministry is carried out by sisters, associates and sponsored works across the United States. Below are recent examples of efforts to address the Critical Concern for immigration.

In San Diego, Sister Mary Waskowiak regularly accompanies migrants to their court hearings, where her status as a Catholic Nun has, at times, carried weight with one judge. She continues her work through Casa Misericordia in collaboration with the Pope Francis Center, a new parish-based organization that offers legal resources, social services, and emotional and spiritual support to immigrants. To learn more about her work in Southern California, read Sister Mary's [op-ed](#) in the *San Diego Tribune* in December of 2025, or watch this [video interview](#) from 2023, featuring her and Sister Mary Kay Dobolvrony.

In Michigan, Sister Pat Lamb helped to start—and continues to serve with—the Strangers No Longer network, a coalition of faith communities committed to advocacy and direct support for immigrants in local communities. Sister Pat works closely with families in need and recently spoke at an in-service for Mercy High School staff in Farmington Hills, addressing immigration as a critical justice issue.

In the Philadelphia area, Sister Anne Connolly collaborates with members of the Jewish community on a project called Welcoming Homes, a small organization with strong connections to local shelters where unaccompanied migrant youth can live until they turn 18. Sister Anne reports, "We have found homes for fifteen youth as an alternative to them being released to adult jail. We have found amazing hosts who open their homes and their hearts to these kids. School,



Sister Anne Connolly, left, with friends from Welcoming Homes

medical care, and legal protection are top priorities. A recent arrival from Guinea and another from Guatemala are my main focus during cold winter months." Sister Ann talks about how her time living on the U.S.–Mexico border informs her work in Pennsylvania in this 2023 [video interview](#).

In Portland, Sister Pat Pora continues to accompany immigrants, reporting many are now absent from church due to fear of ICE. In response, the food pantry program has been making deliveries, and some schools are teaching remotely so children can remain safe at home. The spiritual community at large has been a resource for many of these communities, providing free legal training and family support. Read about Sister Pat's work in her own words in the second half of [this article](#).

Mercy Associate Joanne Castner participated in a Mercy-sponsored immersion trip to the U.S.–Mexico border three years ago. Since then, she has made it her mission to educate people in Pennsylvania regarding the plight of immigrants. To date, Joanne has delivered 33 talks, reaching more than 800 people. She has been welcomed to speak in communities that span the entire political spectrum.

In the San Francisco Bay area, Sisters Joan Marie O'Donnell, Judy Carle and Deborah Watson are active with advocacy groups that support immigrants. In January of this year, they participated in a two-day, multi-faith vigil and fast that included a rally to support



Sisters Joan Marie O'Donnell, Judy Carle, & Deborah Watson stand in support of Guillermo Medina Reyes

Guillermo Medina Reyes as he prepared to appear in San Francisco federal court. Guillermo, who had been brought to the United States at the age of 6, was seeking to avoid being returned to detention. Their advocacy also includes efforts to close immigration prisons and prevent new facilities from opening. They are currently focused on opposing a prison that could house as many as 2,500 people and is operating illegally without the required permits. Sisters

Judy and Joan also involve other sisters in writing letters of support to immigrants who are being held in detention. Last March, their work was featured in [this article](#) and further discussed in a September 2023 [video interview](#).

Sister Rosemary Welsh continues her decades-long ministry with immigrants near the United States border with Mexico. Among their most urgent needs are meals at shelters and legal referrals for long-time area residents who don't have legal status. Learn more about Sister Rosemary's work in this [video interview](#).

The Vermont Mercy Social Justice Committee hosted a public informational session on February 1, featuring representatives from Migrant Justice and the Vermont Afghan Alliance. Approximately 30 community members attended to learn about the organizations' programs and the current challenges facing migrants in the community. On February 6, Vermont sisters and associates participated in a peaceful vigil organized by Vermont Faith Communities outside the courthouse in St. Albans in support of Steven Tendo, a Ugandan asylum seeker, pastor, union member and torture survivor. The vigil was originally planned to accompany Tendo to his ICE check-in. However, he was detained by ICE several days before his scheduled appointment.

In a recent [Global Sisters Report](#) article, Sister Mary Jo Baldus described the fear affecting immigrant communities and protesters in Winona, Minnesota, a community located about two hours south of Minneapolis. Mercy Associate Christine Wilde, who lives in northern Minnesota, has taken part in protests against ICE actions with her local Indivisible group. When the local Mexican restaurant closed for several days out of fear of ICE raids, her group offered support to the proprietors.

Sisters and associates in Rhode Island have played a role in the Diocese of Providence's new immigration initiatives, including the formation of a Migration Commission and praying the rosary outside of the ICE detention center in Central Falls with Bishop Bruce Lewandowski. The Institute Justice Team also has been involved with the Immigration Coalition of Rhode Island, gatherings faith leaders around the state to prepare for a surge of immigration enforcement and advocating on several immigration-related bills in the state legislature. Up until recently, Sisters Ann McKenna and Mary Pendergast taught a course through the Diocese of Providence to prepare immigrants for the citizenship test. The recent trimester was cancelled because not enough people are coming to classes anymore due to fear in the community.

Margie Rudnik, a member of the Chicago Mercy Justice Committee, has organized associates to address immigration concerns. In collaboration with the SHARE Foundation, Margie and other associates are fundraising to support Foro de Mujeres por la Vida in Honduras, a collaborative of 15 organizations dedicated to women in Honduras. The aim is to make the country safer for women, so they don't feel immigration is their only way to escape dangerous situations. ["Safety for Those Who Stay"](#) is the theme of the fundraising campaign.

Sisters in New Hampshire, including Eileen Brady, Rosemary Burnham, and Nat McDonough, participate in monthly vigils at the federal building in Manchester where ICE interviews take place. These vigils are interfaith and include a “Jericho Walk” around the building to raise awareness. Associate Sharon Dalton recently traveled to El Salvador and Honduras with the SHARE delegation and is working to host an Associate from Honduras in the New England area this spring.

In Connecticut, Sisters Betty Secord, Cecilia Baranowksi, Sue Keefe, Pam Michaels, Nancy Audette, and Mary Alice Synkiewicz volunteer with the Hartford Deportation Defense in collaboration with other immigration groups. Trained to understand the court proceedings and immigrants’ rights, they accompany immigrants to court hearings and ICE check-ins.

Saint Xavier University in Chicago will pilot the first Justice Roadshow in March of this year. Co-sponsored by the Institute Justice Team and the Conference for Mercy Higher Education, the roadshow will feature a week of campus activities centered on the theme of immigration. Planned activities include a service project; a “know your rights” seminar; a panel discussion on local immigration efforts; and a prayer service.