



SEEKING COMFORT AND HOPE: AN IMMIGRANT STORY

November 2012

This is the second story in a series of stories of immigrants from our Catholic communities in Illinois. These stories follow up on the Illinois Bishops' January 2012 statement in support of immigrant families, which can be found at www.ilcatholic.org under "Bishops Statements."

"Lupe" had come to the United States from Mexico in 1998 at the age of 16 to care for the children of a woman living in Utah. She moved to Belleville in 2002, where she lives with her five American-born children and her sister and her two children. Lupe works two part-time jobs in the restaurant industry to help provide for her family.

But one Friday afternoon, Lupe experienced a mother's worst nightmare.

She received a call at work from her sister that her two oldest children had not returned home from school. When nightfall came and the 10-year-old girl and 12-year-old boy had not shown up, Lupe and her sister set out to search the streets of their Belleville neighborhood. Friends and neighbors suggested Lupe call the police.

But a call to the police would only cause a second nightmare: the discovery that Lupe is undocumented.

What if they discovered that she was in this country without legal status? They could send her back to Mexico, separating her from her children. She had already escaped a brush with the police two years earlier, when she was involved in a minor driving accident. She was cited for not having a driver's license or insurance. Fearful that her undocumented status would be discovered, she paid the hefty fines and bought insurance and has not had any traffic violations since then.

So when her children went missing, she felt she could not turn to the police for help. She prayed that they were safe, while continuing to search over the weekend. When Monday came, she went to the school, thinking she would find them, but they were not there either. School officials called the police and asked the teachers and other students if they had seen Lupe's children. A student mentioned she had seen the children at a neighbor's house on Saturday. Lupe's children apparently had visited a friend after school, and told the mother that Lupe had given her permission for them to stay overnight. Soon thereafter, Lupe and her children were reunited. Although this story has a happy ending, it illustrates the depth of one woman's fear of being discovered as an undocumented immigrant.

There are not many places Lupe felt safe to turn to for help. However, Lupe does look to her faith for comfort and hope and has found much support from the Catholic Church. Sr. Cecilia Hellmann, ASC, Coordinator of Hispanic Ministry for the Diocese of Belleville, as well as other lay Hispanic leaders, have helped Lupe with housing and educational needs for her children. They have also provided pastoral care and support to the entire family.

This month on November 13 we celebrate the feast day of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, the patron saint of immigrants. As we recall and celebrate the life of Mother Cabrini, may we pray for immigrant mothers who turn to the Catholic Church for comfort and hope as they struggle to care for their children while facing an immigration system in need of compassionate reform.

For more information on immigration issues, as well as other important legislative issues, go to:

www.ilcatholic.org

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