

ANGELS WITH ONE WING

Part II — The Economics of Immigration: A Few Facts

By Kris Schrader, ASC

One tenth of Guatemalan society now lives in the U.S., over a million and a half people. The money earned here and sent back is the **#1 source** of income for the country. It is greater than money received for coffee and sugar exports combined.

The U.S. is dealing with a significant financial crisis, including a 3.9 percent inflation rate in 2008. In the same period, the inflation rate for Guatemala was about twice that. Other economic indices suggest that if the funding coming from workers in the US dried up, over 60% of Guatemalan society would live not just in poverty, but below the extreme poverty level. But do we really want to know about Francisca, a mother of three, one a Down Syndrome baby and another struggling with cystic fibrosis? She isn't looking to the government for help because there isn't any, but is living and providing treatment for her children because her husband was working in Postville, Iowa at the meat packing plant. "We are each of us angels with one wing...and we can only fly embracing one another."

We really need to look and see what is happening here. Five million U.S. children have at least one undocumented parent. The massive raids by immigration agents and now local law enforcement are truly putting kids at risk with family separations, psychological trauma and economic hardship. Raids are increasing; there are federal lawsuits pending which charge that immigration agents have systematically entered homes and made arrests without proper warrants; there are huge paramilitary operations going on where it is commonplace to use helicopters, jeeps and mobile homes for processing those who are apprehended. Schools are impacted. Colleges and universities are being threatened, and I don't know if college communities are even questioning how they might respond to this reality. I don't know if this college community has an immigrant population and is making choices around this situation. But I do know if our choice is to simply keep quiet we are in serious trouble.

At the same time, immigration is profitable to the U.S. economy. Two quick statistical facts: The value of Social Security and Medicare contributions by undocumented workers has accumulated to almost \$6 billion. After spending time in the Earnings Suspense File which tracks payroll tax deductions with mismatched Social Security numbers, the funds are credited to and commingled with the general Social Security trust fund. Social Security actuaries now calculate that undocumented workers are currently subsidizing the retirement of legal residents at the rate of \$8.9 billion a year, which the undocumented worker will never receive as benefits.

The second fact is the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency, known as ICE, was re-formed under Homeland Security in 2003 as a law enforcement agency for the post 9/11 era to integrate enforcement authorities against criminal and terrorist activities, including the fights against human trafficking and smuggling and sexual predators who prey on children. There is no doubt that ICE fulfills an extremely important and noble duty. But the question is why tarnish its stellar reputation by targeting harmless illegal workers? And the answer is economics and politics. ICE is under enormous pressure to turn out statistical figures that might justify a fair use of its capabilities, resources and ballooning budget. The agency has grown to 17,000 employees and a \$5 billion budget. The real numbers are not in human trafficking or terrorism related arrests, but rather forced deportations. In Fiscal Year 2007, over a quarter million undocumented peoples were removed. "*...angels with only one wing...*"