



Photo: CNS/Paul Haring

# Catholic Church and Accompaniment

## What is accompaniment?

In the migration context, our call to accompany migrants requires that we help, support, serve, and advocate with and for them from the start of their migration experience to its end. Accompaniment also encourages greater mutual understanding and formation and leadership opportunities for directly impacted communities and community supporters. Accompaniment might include assisting undocumented immigrants who are required to check in with ICE on a semi-regular basis or supporting them as they attend their mandatory immigration hearings and court proceedings. It could involve assisting an unaccompanied child and their parents to enroll in school. It might include giving a family a ride to a medical appointment or just being there to listen to their stories. Accompanying an individual through this process can provide comfort, spiritual and emotional support. It can build solidarity with immigrants and their families as well as build bridges of understanding and mutual interest within communities.

## Why does the Church believe in accompaniment?

Accompaniment is an important concept in Catholic Social Teaching. The act of providing emotional, physical, and spiritual support to people in need as well as walking in their shoes is a critical part in recognizing the human dignity and experience of every person. In his [2018 migration day message](#), Pope Francis spoke about how “the Lord entrusts to the Church’s motherly love every person forced to leave their homeland in search of a better future”. He then emphasized the importance of welcoming, supporting, protecting, and integrating immigrants as a high priority for the Church. Each of these broad themes, when put into practice, are important ways in which accompaniment can be made concrete.

## Are there examples of accompaniment in the Bible?

The call to accompany and support immigrants is based on the rich heritage of Scripture and the Church’s teaching. The patriarchs of the Church themselves were nomads who were settled by the hand of God in the time of Abraham. They soon migrated to Egypt, where they suffered oppression and were delivered once again by God’s hand. From this experience comes a deep appreciation for the migrant journey as highlighted in the words of Scripture: “You shall treat the stranger who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt” ([Leviticus 19:34](#)). Jesus echoes this tradition when he proclaims, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me” ([Matthew 25:35](#)). Throughout the years the Church has remained faithful to this call to care for and have solidarity with immigrants of all kinds and has worked to respond accordingly.

## What are some modern-day examples of Church accompaniment?

- [Catalino Guerrero](#) is a 59-year-old who has lived in the U.S. for 25 years. He fled from his home country of Mexico due to high crime and lack of employment opportunities in 1991 and he is now a grandfather of four who experiences health problems. Catalino is a member of St. Augustine Parish in Union City, NJ, and has long sought a path to citizenship here in the U.S. But in 2017, he was informed that he would likely be removed by ICE. Cardinal Joseph Tobin and other faith leaders and community members accompanied him to his ICE check-in and he was granted a reprieve of a one-year stay.
- [Maribel Trujillo](#) is an undocumented mother of four US citizen children and an active church member within the Archdiocese of Cincinnati who was deported in late April of 2017. She had lived in Cincinnati as a bread-winning mother and community member since 2002, but in 2007, she was picked up by ICE during a worksite raid. She applied for asylum, but her application was eventually denied in 2014 and she received a final order of removal soon after in 2015. After the requests from hundreds of members of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati for her to be allowed to stay, Maribel was granted a stay from deportation for one year and was required to periodically check-in with ICE officials. However, at her check-in March of 2017, she once again was ordered to prepare for deportation. The Archdioceses of Cincinnati and New Orleans, Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC), the Ohio Catholic Conference, and other local and national organizations all worked tirelessly on Maribel's behalf to stop her final order of removal but despite their efforts, ICE officials still decided to deport her.
- Both [Erika and Jesus Fierro](#) of Indianapolis faced the possibility of deportation. Erika's husband Jesus received a final order of removal first and was deported back to Mexico in May of 2018. Erika, who had lived in the U.S. since she was 5-years-old worried about whether she would be next and whether she would be separated from her U.S. citizen children. Erika turned to St. Patrick Parish and the Archdiocese of Indianapolis for support. Archbishop Charles Thompson, several clergy, and over 30 people from the community accompanied Erika to her ICE check-in. But her worst fears were soon confirmed, despite having the community behind her she was ordered by ICE officials to leave the country by the end of June. After receiving the order of removal, Erika and her U.S. citizen children chose to leave the United States voluntarily and reunite with her husband in Mexico.
- [Hugo Mejia](#) is a devoted husband, father, churchgoer, and a hardworking construction worker. He was arrested in 2017 by immigration authorities and taken to a detention center. Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of the Archdiocese of San Francisco went to visit and pray with his family and to help provide the support they needed. Local organizations and community members worked tirelessly to bring Hugo home and after months of advocating for his release, Hugo was finally released on bond and got to celebrate Thanksgiving with his family. Hugo's case is still pending, and it could be months or years before it is decided but for the time being, Hugo is just happy to be home.