



What is the Catholic Accompaniment and Reflection Experience program?

Photo: Natalie Hoefler, The Criterion

What is CARE?

The Catholic Accompaniment and Reflection Experience (CARE) is a new pilot initiative that was launched by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services in the fall of 2018. CARE is committed to connecting Catholic volunteers as well as men and women religious with fellow Catholic community members who are undocumented immigrants, unaccompanied children, and their families in need of accompaniment and emotional, social service, and spiritual support when integrating into their communities or attempting to comply with immigration proceedings such as reporting to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for check-ins or attending immigration hearings.

What is the goal of CARE?

The CARE program aims to provide accompaniment to and solidarity with undocumented immigrants and their families while they comply with immigration proceedings as well as to further Catholic community support for immigrants at the parish and local community level. CARE also aims to empower undocumented and mixed status families and local community supporters to raise awareness and educate about current immigration realities and advocate for change and increased leadership roles in their community.

Who is participating?

The Archdiocese of San Francisco and the Archdiocese of Indianapolis are the pilot sites for the initial CARE program kick-off. Both San Francisco and Indianapolis have been successful in fostering community-based solutions to help serve immigrant families. Additionally, Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of the Archdiocese of San Francisco and Archbishop Charles Thompson of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis have both voiced their support for the program and its' goals of accompaniment, solidarity, and encounter. The two archdioceses will also serve as mentors to new sites that are to be added as the CARE program further develops.

What is an "ICE check-in"?

An ICE check-in is a face-to-face meeting between an undocumented immigrant and ICE agents in a local field office in

which the individual “checks-in” with ICE agents to keep up to date on their case’s progress or to share any new information with them. Many of the individuals who are checking in may have a stayed order of deportation and are known to ICE but have strong community ties and are not known as dangers to their community. Previously from November 2014 until 2017, such ICE check-in appointments did not always result in deportation, but the check in process is now becoming one fraught with fear and uncertainty. More and more immigrants, many of whom have been complying with their ICE check-ins in recent years, are now suddenly being arrested by ICE and put into detention facilities when they show up for their check-in.

What type of support would an unaccompanied child who was reunified with their family in the United States need?

Unaccompanied children who are reunified with their families in the US face many challenges. They often need assistance with integrating into a new community, with enrolling in a new school, with gaining access to physical and mental health community resources, as well as with obtaining legal services that can support and guide them through the difficult US immigration system as they fight against deportation.

Why would undocumented immigrants and their families need accompaniment now?

With the new interpretation of who is now considered a priority for ICE apprehension and removal or deportation many individuals in the undocumented immigrant community who were not previously priorities for removal are now priorities and their families are afraid to engage in daily life or attend their ICE check-ins or immigration court proceedings for fear that they might be targeted for removal and be forced to be separated from their families. These policy changes have already resulted in many cases of undocumented individuals around the country arriving for their ICE check-ins and being told to prepare for deportation or in some cases actually being deported. In the first few weeks of 2017, immigration arrests rose by 32.6 percent and ICE arrests of immigrants with no criminal record doubled. Since the start of 2018, some of the most positive outcomes related to cases where immigrants have participated in ICE check-ins have been cases where the immigrant has been accompanied to the ICE check in by their legal representative, their family, and by a support group of concerned citizens and fellow parishioners.

Why is it important to support unaccompanied children and their families?

Unaccompanied children and their families face the challenge of navigating the extremely complex US immigration system, but without support or assistance, this task can seem almost impossible. After unaccompanied children are detained and transferred to an Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) facility, many children will spend over a month in ORR custody before they are released into the care of a family member or legal guardian. During this time children often feel anxious and scared and are susceptible to developing depression or behavioral issues. Supporting these children throughout their time custody and the deportation process can help provide them with the support services they need and ease their integration back into family life.

Aren’t Catholic religious communities already supporting undocumented immigrants, including unaccompanied children and their families? How does CARE fit in?

Yes, there are many Catholic religious communities, like the Archdiocese of Chicago’s Immigration Ministry, that are already successfully using the model of accompaniment to make a difference in their community. The CARE program fits in by working at the diocesan level to facilitate a larger accompaniment movement by connecting concerned Catholics at individual parishes with undocumented individuals and unaccompanied children and their families in their community and ensuring that they are supported every step of the way to the extent practicable.

How can I learn more?

You can learn more by visiting the Justice for Immigrants website and looking at the resources that are listed there on the CARE program as well as signing up for updates to learn more.

How can I get involved?

You can get involved by reading the CARE training the materials online, participating in webinars, and by finding out if your parish or community has any accompaniment programs that you can participate in and if not, you can write or speak to your local representatives or church leaders about the importance of immigrant rights and programs that support immigrants in your community.

