THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CALIFORNIA serves and advocates for the poor, vulnerable and those in need not because they are Catholic, but because we are Catholic.

MIGRANTS ARE PERSONS, WITH THEIR OWN NAMES, STORIES AND FAMILIES. THERE CAN NEVER BE TRUE PEACE AS LONG AS A SINGLE HUMAN BEING IS VIOLATED IN HIS OR HER PERSONAL IDENTITY AND REDUCED TO A MERE STATISTIC OR AN OBJECT OF ECONOMIC CALCULATION.

– Pope Francis

US-MEXICAN BORDER

Catholics Welcoming Deportees, Migrants and Refugees

At the U.S.-Mexico border fence in Tijuana, people see a big house at the top of a hill adjacent to a skyline-dominating steeple.

The big house is Casa Migrante. Next to it is the church of San Felipe de Jesus and a third building.

For more than 30 years, after people have grappled with the border’s harsh reality, Casa Migrante is a place where they can get immediate help and begin to re-establish a normal life.

Father Pat Murphy, C.S., who runs Casa, says that in recent years 90 percent of the people coming to Casa have just been deported from the United States. Those numbers have been rising recently.

“Some of the people had been living in the U.S. for 30 years,” Father Pat says. “When they arrive they are in a bit of a shock!”

They usually don’t know where to go or what to do. Casa is a short-term spot where they get immediate shelter, meals and clothing.

Equally important, they get help figuring out how to build the rest of their lives. Staff and volunteers at Casa “help them develop a life plan, and where they want to go.”

Father Pat is a member of the Scalabrians, an order founded in 1887 specifically to assist Italian immigrants, then suffering in many countries around the world, including the U.S.

Continued on next page
Born in New York City to Irish immigrant parents, Father Pat was drawn to the Scalabrians’ work in a nearby parish.

“I fell in love with the charism and the mission,” he recalls.

Today, the order staff parishes that had migrant beginnings in four California dioceses: San Diego, Los Angeles, Monterey and San Jose. (See link below for locations)

“We basically go to where the migrants are,” he adds. Tijuana certainly meets those parameters.

Since its founding in 1987, the Casa has served more than 260,000 migrants. They arrive with a desire to work and, usually, little more. The Casa gives them a safe bed, meals, clothing and, perhaps most important, coaching to help them figure out what to do next. Men stay in one building. Women and children are sheltered in a separate building, adjacent to the tall-steepled church that punctuates the skyline within sight of the border.

Some may return to long-left home towns; but others may decide to stay in Tijuana with its huge base of unfilled jobs. Some settle in other parts of Mexico, which “is very open to people seeking asylum,” Father Pat notes.

Scalabrian volunteers help fill key roles in the centers. They mostly are in their 20s and 30s; many are Mexicans, some from the U.S. Asked to serve for a year, although that is flexible, the volunteers go through a solid orientation process before they begin working with migrants.

Patterns of immigration at the border change over the years. In the 1980s, the center helped mostly Mexicans seeking to enter the U.S. In the 1990s, it helped more people moving back into Mexico under government pressure. Then other groups, including Africans, Caribbean refugees and other countries, added to the mix of people seeking to enter the U.S. Most recently, people seeking to escape violence in Central America make up a large share of those trying to enter the U.S. But more than 30 countries typically are represented in a year’s total.

For those who come up against the barriers of the border, there almost always is a short-term bed available at the Scalabrian centers as well as a meal, counseling on how to put their life onto a secure path again, and a place to pray.

For more information ...

Casa del Migrante en Tijuana, A.C.  
https://casadelmigranteenjuana.com/en/

Scalabrini Background  
http://www.scalabrini.org/website/index.html#

Catholic Charities of California Immigrant Services  