

Immigrants tell their stories at Fort Worth prayer meeting

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FORT WORTH—Immigration law can be to be a sensitive subject to talk about in any setting, so Iglesia Victoria en Cristo in Fort Worth decided to talk about it with God.

Immigrants from Latin America make up most of the church's members and leaders. So, at a time when immigration laws are changing and immigrants are left in uncertainty, the church decided to take their pleas to God, Youth Minister Anyra Cano said.



Pastor Carlos Valencia and Minister to Youth Anyra Cano lead a prayer service for immigrants at Iglesia Victoria en Cristo in Fort Worth. (Photo / Isa Torres)

“In the midst of darkness, even when we see what is happening in regards

to immigration laws that affect us and our families, we remember we can be light to that darkness,” Cano said.

During the prayer service, immigrants told their stories. From immigrants whose parents brought them when they were children to professionals who came to the United States seeking better opportunities, the church heard about their diverse experiences and the varied challenges they face.

Dreamers hope lawmakers find permanent solution

Itzayana Aguirre’s parents brought her to the United States when she was a child. After the Trump Administration announced plans to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, she and the hundreds of thousands of Dreamers—as DACA recipients often are called—have been waiting for lawmakers to find a permanent solution.

Since Aguirre was a child, her parents have encouraged her to study, she said. Currently, she is pursuing a Master of Business Administration degree at Baylor University. She will finish her degree in May 2019, and her permission to remain in the United States expires in September 2019.

“God has taught me to trust on his will, so I currently trust God will solve these issues and that he will not be late,” Aguirre said.

Some live in fear, others in deprivation

Some who told about their experiences during the Fort Worth prayer service hold valid visas or work permits, but they still remember what it felt like not to have them.

Marvin Molina, who arrived from El Salvador in 1997 because he heard he

could pursue his dreams in the United States, said that even after living in the country more than 20 years, he still empathizes with those who fear deportation.

He identified more with that fear three months ago, when his sister—a single mother of three children—was deported to El Salvador while her children remained in the United States.

“When one lives that, one can understand how hard that can be,” Molina said. “So, we pray that more families will not go through that, even when they try to do what is right.”

Many immigrant families who arrive in the United States struggle, said Else Medellin, who arrived when she was 8 years old. She remembers how her parents did everything they could to cut costs.

“I grew up thinking you could reuse the coffee grounds up to five times in the coffee maker, because that is what my parents did,” Medellin said. “It wasn’t until later my mom told me they only did that to save money.”

Still, Medellin can look back and see how God provided for her family when they felt they did not have enough.

Looking for safety

Some at the prayer meeting told stories of immigrating to the United States to escape danger in their home countries.

“Sharing my story is to share the story of millions of Salvadorans, Mexicans, Hondurans and many others,” said Anita Rodriguez, who arrived in the United States two years ago. “While Salvadorans used to leave their country to come here for better opportunities, now that has changed, and they come because they look for safety.”

Immigrants flee persecution, danger and death, Rodriguez said.

“The majority of people coming here are crossing the borders because they know there is no other option for them,” she said. “They can either come here and stay, or they can go back home and die.”

Seeking opportunities

Raquel Chacin told her story as a professional who came to the United States from Venezuela looking for a better life.

“This country has offered me two things my country could not—safety and better work opportunities,” she said.

Chacin completed her master’s degree in counseling at Dallas Baptist University, but found it hard to get a job.

“Some institutions have said they would welcome me and help me get a work visa, but then they have backed down,” Chacin said.

Returning to the political turmoil of Venezuela, where many people do not have access to food and medicine, is not an option, she said.

“No one leaves their country because they just want to,” she said. “But while things seem really dark right now, God has given promises to both the immigrants and those who welcome immigrants.”

Chacin read Leviticus 19:33-34, in which God instructs Israel how to treat foreigners, and Deuteronomy 10:18, where God promises to care for the immigrant.

“This is a small taste of all that is happening right now,” said Carlos Valencia, pastor of Victoria en Cristo. “We are thankful to have a God who listens to us and in whom we can have hope, as well as the church, which

can walk with us and also take action when we are in need.”