



Sister of Mercy, Mary Schmuck, serves with the Archdiocese of Louisville Catholic Charities Parish Social Ministry Department.

# Immigration Has Several Sides

A dozen years ago I spent 2 weeks with our Sisters of Mercy living and serving in Guam and the Philippines. It was a life-transforming experience. Moments from it stay with me to this day.

Guam is a petite, 30-mile long island that has three U. S. military bases on it. With such assured economic resources, the standard of living is quite high.

The Philippines is different. Five of our Sisters served in a major hospital in greater Manila; 40 lived and served a thousand miles south in north-west Mindanao, the very large island on the southern end of the reported 7000 islands there. Philippine standard of living is much lower. It was heart-rending to hear the Philippine government in effect giving away hunks of national sovereignty in order to attract outside investment so the Philippines could double its industrial capacity in 5 years.

I met with several groups of our Sisters and Mercy Associates in the course of the visit. Issues on their minds: nuclear weapons, a range of economic issues—and the safety of their children who were contract workers in the Middle East and the U. S.. The people of the Philippines were sending their precious young people, already educated, to other countries to get a good job and support their families at home. Their parents worried about these children a whole lot. Reports of murder and a range of abuse were shared and continue to come through the media since. The money these contract workers sent home represented 1/6 of the Philippine economy!

Stateside, I saw, with new eyes and softened heart, the young people from many other countries in our big coastal cities—how hard they worked, how earnestly they prayed at church.

In this new century noticeable immigration has come to Kentucky—quite inland from our coasts. The people I see are young men, hard working, doing-the-job-thoroughly younger men. I have no doubt that their families likewise worry about them—while counting significantly on the money they send home from all their hard work here. It has to be hard on them and their families at home that they are a thousand or so miles away.

Some questions I continue ponder: What is the matter at home that they cannot get good jobs there? What is the cause of that situation at home? Who all are responsible for the decisions producing and prolonging that situation? What can I do as a U.S. citizen to help make this situation more win/win for all involved, certainly more just?

Until we carefully examine these questions, our current concern for the legal status of people coming into the U. S. has a hollow ring somehow, seems short-sighted for sure—and of course the U. S. has a right to regulate our borders. However, because of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) it is the case that \$\$\$\$ and things can cross our Mexican/U. S./Canadian borders freely; it's just people who cannot. And we proclaim that we believe that human persons are more valuable than things? Which does God value most? How does God see all this?

June 25, 2007

*The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.*