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OPINION

Literacy Volunteering in your Community

Reading changes lives!



BY BENTLEY DE BARDELABEN

My grandmother used to say, "Being blessed by God is wonderful, but being a blessing to others because God blessed you is more important."

While I was not raised in a household where attending Sunday morning worship was highly valued, it was still important to my parents that they raise children who understood that service to those less fortunate was an essential part of being a good, responsible, and educated person. Because of this, I began tutoring students in reading and math skills when I was 12 years old. It was something I enjoyed and had the temperament to do.

Approximately 30 million adults in the United States can't read. They can't understand their own prescription bottle, figure out a bus schedule, or even order off a menu – actions which many of us take for granted. The consequences of this silent epidemic are profound. There is a 66 percent chance that a

person who cannot read at a proficient level by the 4th grade will end up on welfare or in jail. Approximately 85 percent of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate.

Understanding the importance of this issue, he United Church of Christ began developing an all-church initiative to bring awareness to the challenge of multigenerational low literacy levels. The program was appropriately called "Reading Changes Lives."

This robust campaign launched in the fall of 2014 with an "all-church read" of the book, "Hot Dogs and Hamburgers: Unlocking Life's Potential by Inspiring Literacy at Any Age," written by Rob Shindler. The next step on the journey occurred on March 4. It was a day of dialog on social media where people shared how they were addressing illiteracy in their communities.

Finally the campaign culminated on June 29 with a daylong training for adult literacy tutors and a school supply drive during the UCC General Synod in Cleveland, Ohio. All together UCC members stuffed 1,000 backpacks with school supplies that

will be given to local elementary school students and donated enough additional supplies to fill another 1,500 backpacks.

During the training, Rob Shindler shared the inspirational story of his son who had been labeled severely disabled, an experience that ultimately led him to identify his call as a tutor. "You can teach someone to read in less than 2 and ½ days," Shindler said. "All it takes is one hour a week for 52 weeks."

Recently, I began tutoring adult students who want to take the GED test. Fortunately, there are staff and teachers' guides onsite to assist when I'm unsure about the subject material. I'm learning much from my students, as I hope they are learning from me. Those values instilled and embodied in my childhood household continue to shape me in adulthood.

You can learn more about literacy volunteering in your community by visiting literacydirectory.org. I hope you too will join this campaign to help change lives through reading.

The Rev. Bentley de Bardelaben is executive for administration and communications for Justice and Witness Ministries in the United Church of Christ.

Routine Traffic Stops Shouldn't Rip Families Apart

Scapegoating immigrants isn't the answer

BY CECILIA VELASCO

About three years ago, my dad was driving the truck he uses for his landscaping business in Phoenix, Ariz. when he was pulled over. Two patrol cars cornered him for making a wide right turn.

Yes, you read that right: Multiple police officers went out of their way to stop my dad for supposedly making a right turn too wide.

The traffic cops grilled my dad and his coworker about their immigration status. They let my dad, a Mexican immigrant and U.S. citizen, go on his way without even issuing a warning. Then they arrested his coworker, who happened to be an undocumented immigrant.

What seemed like a normal drive to work turned into a nightmare.

Traffic stops that often begin with this kind of racial profiling, along with parking tickets

and other minor offenses have led to two-thirds of the record 2 million deportations during the Obama administration. These daily expulsions have instilled a culture of pain and fear among all our nation's immigrant communities.

When some of those communities urged their local governments to do something about it, about 300 cities responded by becoming some-

thing called a "sanctuary city." Maybe you've heard a lot about these places lately but don't know what a sanctuary city is.

It's a term for localities where police officers don't have the added responsibility of acting as federal immigration authorities. As a result, people won't be deported without a compelling reason, more families will remain united, and police officers will get to focus on the already tough job of policing real criminals instead of racially profiling drivers.

Sanctuary cities serve everyone's interest.

They boost public safety and foster trust between local law enforcement and immi-

grant communities. Undocumented immigrants can work, go to school, and live their lives without constant fear of deportation. They're no longer afraid to report crimes or assist in a police investigation. This restores a bit of the human dignity that immigrants are too often robbed of.

Studies have shown that sanctuary cities are actually safer than other places. But one tragic incident has ignited a debate in Congress and the 2016 presidential race.

Earlier this summer, Kathryn Steinle was shot and killed in San Francisco. Juan Francisco Lopez-Sanchez, the alleged shooter and an undocumented immigrant, had a long criminal record, including drug charges and several deportations. He'd just been released after serving time for re-entry into the country, an act that's considered a felony.

Presidential candidates and politicians are taking advantage of this incident to justify their extremist anti-immigrant views. But studies show that native-born Americans commit crime at a higher rate than immigrants and are five times more likely to be serving time in prison.

There's no reason to pre-

sume that undocumented immigrants are a menace to society. Yet before starting its August recess, the House passed a bill that would deny federal law enforcement funding for sanctuary cities. This measure would reverse years of progress by immigrant rights organizations, local governments, and local police associations.

Steinle's death was a terrible tragedy. But scapegoating undocumented immigrants won't make San Francisco or the rest of the country any safer.

What became of my dad's co-worker? Following that traffic stop arrest, he was de-

tained by local authorities for a couple of days and then handed over to immigration officers. He spent two months in an immigration detention center.

A compassionate judge granted his release because his eldest son was on the brink of becoming a U.S. citizen, and the man obtained a temporary work permit. Happy endings to stories like these would become rarer if anti-immigration House lawmakers get their way.

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