



**Introductory Remarks by Pastor Kim Erno at Vermont Summit on Sanctuary, April 15, 2018**

*On Sunday, April 15, the Interfaith Committee for Sanctuary in Vermont hosted the Vermont Summit on Sanctuary at Holy Family Parish Center in Essex Junction, VT. To follow are introductory remarks shared by Pastor Kim Erno, director of Franklin Alliance for Rural Ministries.*

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH.**

Count the stars in the sky and grains of sand in the desert that is the number of your descendants that will follow you to the land that I will show you. *Caminante no hay camino se hace camino al andar.* Traveler there is no road, so you build the road as you travel. Our ancestors of faith built the road and left their footprints in the sand for us to follow with signs of where we can find an oasis, a sanctuary in the desert.

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH.**

When an enslaved, exploited people decide that they have had enough and they hear the cry, "Let my people go," they flee for freedom's sake and find themselves with their backs to the sea. Suddenly there is a way where was no way, so they walk between the walls of water to reach the other side and wander in a desert to recover their way on the freedom trail.

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH.**

*Vamos por el otro lado.* Let us go to the other side says the itinerant preacher fisherman from Galilee, and suddenly he and his crew are up against the wind and the waves of a perfect imperial storm that would sink their tiny boat and end their project of a new world order. When they land on the other side, they are immediately met by the militarized presence of one who calls himself Legion, a clear reference to the Roman imperial army. In the same way that Jesus calms the waters, he expels the military force that guards the border...like so many borders of today.

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH.**

*Follow the drinkin' gourd / Follow the drinkin' gourd for the ol' man is waitin' for to carry you to freedom / Swing lo, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home...* Songs with codes to give the time and space to break free and head north for places like Vermont that refused to abide by the Fugitive Slave Act, where escaped slaves worked on farms in a safe space to save enough for the last stop on the underground railway in Canada.

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH.**

When we are pursued by death squads and seek cover from the bombs and bullets sent by the U.S. for simply demanding the human right for a plot of land, for a *milpa*, a corn patch, and a roof over our heads, we flee from our tiny country of El Salvador. The Saviour to the same land that brings us death crossing multiple borders and another desert and are given sanctuary in communities of faith from Tucson to L.A. to Chicago to Washington, D.C. to Boston.

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH.**

When global capitalism and trade agreements written by the rich - for the benefit of the rich - rob us of our livelihood and land, and our families are hungry, we uproot ourselves from *nuestra tierra madre*, our mother earth, and scrape together the \$5K, \$6k, \$7K, \$8K to pay our coyote and head to the border....crossing 3, 4, 5, 6 days and nights in the desert,

escaping the migra and the cartels...to come north and work eight or 10 or 12 hours on the dairy farms of Vermont...an invisible work force that keeps the state economy running.

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH.**

...who march from Montpelier to Waterbury to demand “Milk with Dignity,” to say that migrant farm workers deserve a just wage, dignified housing, a break from the back-breaking work. When our brother and sister leaders are harassed and arrested, we stand in solidarity on the capitol steps and demand their release.

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH.**

...who have been on a long, long journey, crossing deserts and waters and borders. Along the way, we have encountered people of solidarity and courage to offer a drink of water, a piece of bread, a place to sleep, shelter from the storm, an oasis in the desert, a sanctuary in the city. That’s why we are here today: To continue that journey to follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us to open the way.

And now if I can close on a personal note...

Six months ago, I would have fought heart and soul for sanctuary in a public space. Now, I have been in the search of sanctuary within my own soul. I am convinced that our capacity to fight the good fight on the outside also requires an inner strength...an inner sanctuary.

As some of you know, my life partner, my wife, Iris Janet Figueroa Flores, died on November 2nd, crossing the border from life to death to new life...which is why I have been absent so many months. She visited farms with me, and our plan was for her to come north and work alongside me in our ministry of serving the migrant farmworker community—especially to accompany the female farmworkers. The Sanctuary T-shirt that I am wearing is what Iris wore on the day of the “Milk with Dignity” march to Montpelier. As I recall that day, I think of the poem by Mario Benedetti:

*Si te quiero es porque tus manos trabajan por la justicia  
Si te quiero es porque vos  
Eres mi amor, mi complice, mi todo  
Y en la calle codo a codo somos muchos mas de dos...  
If I love you it is because your hands work for justice  
If I love you it is because  
You are my love, my accomplice, my everything  
And arm in arm in the street we are much more than two...*

Iris and I are much more than two, so we continue on our path. I am convinced that not even the border between life on this side and life on the other side is enough to stop us dead in our tracks.

**WE ARE A SOJOURNER MIGRANT PEOPLE OF FAITH ON OUR WAY HOME...ON OUR WAY HOME.**

Pastor Kim Erno  
Director | Franklin Alliance for Rural Ministries