

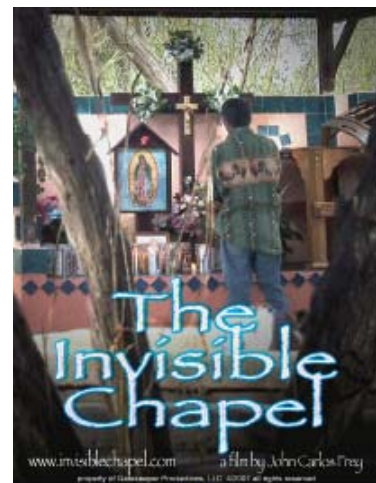
“The Invisible Chapel” Film Discussion Guide

Film length: 31 minutes

Extras: Expert Interviews: 24 minutes

Synopsis:

For over twenty years a migrant chapel remained invisible to the wealthy residents of a San Diego, CA neighborhood. Every Sunday parish volunteers provided humanitarian assistance and held a church service for over one hundred impoverished agricultural, construction and service industry workers from Mexico. Local neighbors, along with the San Diego Minutemen and a Talk-Radio host clashed with the mostly undocumented immigrant congregation. The ensuing conflict forced the migrants and volunteers out of their sacred space and ultimately caused the demolition of their place of worship.



Film Production Background:

Award winning filmmaker John Carlos Frey spent over a year visiting and living amongst the migrants in the clandestine canyons of San Diego, CA. He traveled alone carrying all of his sound, camera and lighting equipment. Many of the migrants were initially reluctant to talk to Mr. Frey. As his trips to the canyon became more frequent, the migrants began to trust and invite him into their homes for a personal look at their lives. As a result of documenting the lives of impoverished migrants, John Carlos Frey and Jack Lorenz produced *The Invisible Mexicans of Deer Canyon* completed in 2006. It was during this film production the team became familiar with the canyon chapel and continued to follow the plight of the migrants culminating in this follow up film, *The Invisible Chapel*. *The Invisible Chapel* is produced in association with the Mexican American Cultural Center.

Vocabulary: scratch back, minutemen, hate crimes, corporal works of mercy, spiritual works of mercy

Themes to Engage Through the Film:

1. *The right to emigrate and the right not to emigrate.*
2. *The history of U.S. immigration laws and societal attitudes towards immigrants over time.*
3. *The role of the Church as an agent of welcome and hospitality - a sanctuary for life.*
4. *The preferential option for the poor - caring and welcoming the most vulnerable.*
5. *The dignity of work and rights of workers - seeking a better life for one's family.*
6. *The nature of solidarity - recognizing we are one human family and love of neighbor has global dimensions.*

Supporting Education for Justice Resources:

- **Backgrounder on Structural Sin**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/2906>
- **The 700-Mile Fence**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/2759>
- **Immigration: The Origins of the Church's Position**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/3261>
- **The Bishops' Five Principles to Guide Immigration Policy**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/2919>
- **Catholic Social Teaching and Immigration**
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/node/2404>

Web Links:

The Invisible Chapel

<http://www.invisiblechapel.com/>

Mexican American Cultural Center

<http://www.maccsa.org/>

To Purchase the DVD

<http://gatekeeperproductions.com/purchase.html>



Film Discussion Guide: Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Before showing the film: Distribute the handout found on pages five and six. Ask participants to complete **side one** before viewing the film. Allow time for people to complete the handout.

Handout -side one: Before viewing the film

- Invite participants to identify their current perspectives on immigration before viewing the film.
 - Assumptions
 - Stereotypes
 - Questions
 - Describe a personal experience with immigrants

Handout -side two: After viewing the film

- After viewing the film, take a few minutes of silent reflection to let the images and message sink in.
- On side two of the handout participants will be asked to answer the following:
 1. What changed or shifted as a result of viewing the film?
 2. What was reinforced about your views on immigration after viewing the film?
 3. What new questions arose as a result of the film?

General Discussion Questions:

- *After having viewed the film, what is the significance and meaning of the title?*
 - *What is your reaction to the film?*
 - *What scenes stand out?*
 - *In one sentence what is the film saying?*
1. Why can't "they" come here legally?
 2. If it's so bad here, why don't they go back?
 3. Are the parishioners in the film breaking the law? What about the separation of church/state?
 4. Compare and contrast the themes of violence and nonviolence in the film.
 5. What does it mean to be one body in Christ?
 6. What happens when economic realities are at odds with political interests?



Hand made benches are covered in carpet remnants and serve as seating for the migrant chapel while a blue tarp overhead protects from the sun.



The congregation can reach over 100 individuals. The chapel is nestled under a canopy of trees and hidden from sight.

Links to Learn More: Supporting Material Online

- **700-Mile Fence** report, "Virtual Border Fence Given Mixed Assessment in First Test" <http://www.migrationinformation.org/USfocus/display.cfm?id=675>
- **Mexican Migration Project** - an online resource center which gathers social as well as economic information on Mexican-US migration. <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/home-en.aspx>
- **GAO report on building fences** – it doesn't work. Read the report, "Secure Border Initiative" at <http://homeland.house.gov/SiteDocuments/20080227105433-48186.pdf>
- **Migration Policy Institute** - current research and resources on immigration. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/>



In-Depth Discussion Questions:

1. The film opens with the scene where a Mexican is leading the viewer to a hidden “church” in the canyon. In a country that guarantees the right to religious freedom, why is the church hidden? What was your reaction when you heard the church was hidden and was a Catholic church? Why was it hidden?
2. Our Lady of Guadalupe figures predominantly in this film. Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is a significant source of strength spanning generations. Why is she so highly revered among the Mexicans? Where do you see evidence of devotion to her? What did you learn about her in this film?
3. There is a striking similarity in the film between the feeding of the 5,000 in Matthew’s gospel (see Matthew 14:15-21) and the three women from the parish – “giving them something to eat” themselves. How did they respond to the needs before them? What struck you, what challenged you, what inspired you?
4. Why were the men living in such stark conditions?
5. The film highlights some stark contrasts:
 - between generosity and greed
 - between self-centeredness and selflessness
 - between inclusion and exclusion
 - between the promotion of violence and nonviolence
 - between the million dollar homes and the “shanty town” of the migrants
 - between the building of million dollar homes and the tearing down of the chapel
 - between the “vitriolic hate speech of the minutemen/women and the words of nonviolence of Generoso
 What insights do these contrasts offer? What other stark contrasts did you notice?
6. One of the themes of Catholic social teaching is the idea of solidarity. What Christauria describes is the principle of solidarity. What is solidarity? How do you see this evident in the interactions?
7. The definition of a saint is, “an ordinary human being who lives their faith in an extraordinary way.” Fr. Frank calls Generoso a saint, an extraordinary man of faith. What evidence of this do you see in the film?
8. In many different scenes, the movie explores the nature of faith. What struck you about the nature of faith witnessed in the film?
9. How does this film demonstrate the vision of the Church promoted at Vatican II – that being a church engaged and responsive to the needs of people in the modern world? How does the film show the church as responsive?
10. Fr. Frank observes that, “They [the migrant workers] are so demeaned in this society, that coming to a place where they are accepted for who they are and loved for who they are” is part of why they come to the invisible chapel – in order to experience that. How are the values of the U.S. society held in contrast with the values of the migrants. How would you name the values of U.S. society? What values do you see displayed by the men and women in this film?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

11. There were several ironies in the film. One striking irony occurs when they are celebrating the Eucharist and Fr. Frank is praying the Eucharistic prayer saying all are welcome at the table,
- “And so as we celebrate this Eucharist today, we thank God for giving us faith, we thank God for our families, for life itself ...gratitude is what we’re about now in this Eucharist – where God invites us to God’s own table, to be fed and strengthened, and God invites us all to the table because God loves each one here with no strings attached. Each one here is sacred to God. Each one of you here is deeply loved by God. God’s love for you knows no bounds, it is not something that we earn, but something that we try to open ourselves to...”*

Yet why are they in a hidden chapel and not welcomed by the wider society? What strikes you about these words? What other ironies did you notice?

12. Matthew 25: 31-46 is lived and witnessed by the people in this film. Describe how both communities are living witnesses here. *“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me.”* (Mt 25:40)
13. The film provides a powerful testament to the nature of faith. What is revealed about the power of faith? How is faith related to generosity, justice, mercy, and sacrifice?
14. Faith built the invisible chapel and fear tore it down. Explain.
15. How does the role of the media affect the events that unfold in the canyon? How has media shaped and influenced the way U.S. citizens see this issue? Is it balanced? Who “wins” and who “loses” by the media’s portrayal?

16. The newscaster describes the group of migrants as “an illegal group of squatters.” What is your reaction to that description? Is the description an accurate one? Who does it serve?



Remnants of an altar candle after the demolition of the chapel.

17. What was your reaction when the allegations of Julie Adams were false? What may have been behind her comments and media attention?
18. The Southern Poverty Law Center describes the minute men as a “Nativist Extremist” organization targeting individual immigrants rather than immigration policy. Why would such an approach be preferred? Why would Julie Adams align herself with this group?
19. In the face of racism and hate, Generoso states, *“Those that don’t like us, there’s nothing I can say to them. That’s their business. If I start to criticize them it won’t do any good. There’s only one God and we are all children of God. ...What can you say to those who hate us? Let them be. God is the one who cares for us. God is the one who gives us life. It is not my place to say if they do good or bad. It is not their fault. I won’t insult them. I won’t say anything bad about them.”* What is your reaction? How would you have responded?
20. What is the vision, message and intent of the film? What did you take away from it? Discuss.

Handout - Before:

- *Before viewing the film, take a few minutes to identify your current perspectives on immigration. Complete the questions below in the space provided.*

o I assume that immigrants:

o The adjectives that I would use to describe immigrants are:

o Questions I have about immigration are:

o Describe a personal experience with immigrants:

Handout - After:

- *After viewing the film, take a few minutes of silent reflection to let the images and message sink in. In the space provided record your responses.*

Reactions and Thoughts:

Words or phrases that struck you:

Images and Impressions:

What changed or shifted as a result of viewing the film? What was reinforced?

What new questions arose as a result of the film?
