Hello everyone! I want to give a warm welcome to each of you to Georgetown University; thank you so much for joining us tonight.

My name is Jaquelin Martinez, and I am a senior in the College, majoring in Economics and minoring in Portuguese. I am one of the many UndocuHoyas, undocumented undergraduate, graduate students and staff on campus. I am here tonight to join others in going “beyond the wall” in the topic of immigration, and sharing a story that I hope will serve to ground us for the rest of the evening.

I was asked to share about my story as an immigrant, student, and recipient of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, also known as DACA. But I really had in my heart to use this opportunity to tell the story of someone else, of a person that perhaps will never get to share his story on this stage like this.

Tonight I want to share the story of a man named Jose Balmore, who is also known to his family and friends as Moris. Moris was born in 1958 in the small Central American country of El Salvador. Despite being an inquisitive and curious child, he was only able to attend school for a couple of years because his family held the mantra that “letters don’t feed you, so school doesn’t matter.” As the oldest son in the family, his responsibility was to help his single mother make ends meet and care for his younger blind brother. At the age of 12, his mother passed away. Although his grandmother took him in, he knew that the days of being just a kid had passed away. He was now called, at such a young age, to be a man that had to fend for himself.

In the early 1980’s, civil war broke out in El Salvador and Moris was drafted to join the military, that was being financed by the United States, to put an end of the unrest caused by the left-wing group. In hindsight, we know that this civil war was the result of El Salvadorians being tired of the vast and ridiculous inequality that had persisted for so long benefiting only the rich. But Moris remembers the war as “a time of confusion, where no one really understand the reasons for fighting. Men were just expected to take arms and kill their brothers or neighbors if they were declared to be an enemy of the state.”
In 1998 - 6 years after peace had been declared - El Salvador struggled to recover from the war in all aspects. Now married and with three children, Moris knew that opportunities did not look so promising in the land where he had labored since his youth. So he decided to leave it all behind to ensure a better life for them. As someone with little to no formal education or professional background, Moris would have never qualified for a working visa or a green card or a sponsorship. So he took a chance.

After three years after being in the United States, Moris qualified for Temporary Protection Status in 2001 after a disastrous earthquake occurred in El Salvador. With this new status, he was able to have work authorization, get a more stable job with benefits, and save up to have his wife and two daughters join him in this country.

Today, Moris lives in Northern Virginia with his family. He works afternoon shifts at an elementary school doing maintenance work. Last year when he heard news that the president was considering ending the temporary protection status that enables him to work, he went into his room with his wife and a two daughters, and they started praying through the tears.

Now I tell you the story of this man because this man is a personal hero of mine. Moris is my father. I tell his story as an attempt to end the narrative that DREAMers are only those undocumented immigrants that attend prestigious universities like Georgetown University and those that make headlines with their accolades and achievements. But as many of my fellow undocumented students at Georgetown can testify, our parents were the original dreamers that carried with them a love for their family that lead them to do whatever was necessary to ensure a better life for them. As content-creator Ze Frank would say, let me know me so vain to think that I am the sole author of my victories. I am not.

As you process through the story of my father and you continue to hear the stories of wonderful DACA recipients who are valedictorians of their schools, who graduate from elite universities and who get law degrees, I hope that you would be challenged to deconstruct a narrative that demands that you pick between the deserving and undeserving immigrant. And that you look beyond the external criteria of merit and consider the humanity and dignity of the people that are immigrated to this country and are still migrating to their this country - risking everything - in hopes of a better and more dignified life.

Now as an undocumented person, realizing that most people in the room probably are not, I think it my responsibility to share with you two matters that I think are important in you decide to become an ally and join the movement to humanize the conversation around immigration.
I'll begin with the one thing I don’t think the immigrant community needs more of. That is pity. If I shared the story of my father, and I all am able to evoke is pity, then I fear that we will be continuing to have gatherings like this. Continuing to have conversations such as the ones that will have tonight for a much longer time than we desire and expect. Immigrants don’t need pity for the hardships they’ve lived.

Much more than that, what is needed in this conversation is compassionate partnership. Compassion, unlike pity - a friend explained to me the other day - is not concerned with how bad you feel about the suffering of another, but rather with the person undergoing the difficult themselves. When we learn to be compassionate, we think less of ourselves and how bad we feel for others, but are rather driven to act to partner up with these people to defend their humanity and dignity.

I hope that as I stand here today, I don’t sound like a moralist that appears to be more enlightened, or as some of my peers would say, more “woke” than you. As I Christian, I live under the conviction that I am also a faulty and broken human, who loves imperfectly, who cares imperfectly, who advocates imperfectly. The only reason I have a right standing with God and my other fellow humans is not because of my efforts but because of what Christ has accomplished at the cross and in His resurrection. That grace that was granted to me is the main reason I am able to extend grace myself when I fail to meet expectations as an immigrant and as an advocate. Thankfully, I am also able to extend grace to those that still stand on a different side on this debate. I understand that we need to engage with those that disagree with us if we ever hope to drive policy forward.

I am very grateful to the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life for hosting this important gathering on the human impacts, moral principles, and policy directions on immigration.

Tonight you will hear from four panelists: a religious woman on the front lines of the crisis, a moral theologian, an advocate for the U.S. bishops on immigration issues, and an Evangelical leader on immigration.

I now want to introduce John Carr, director of the Initiative and moderator of tonight’s dialogue. Thank you.