

Like others with DACA status, United Methodist pastor faces uncertain future

by [Kathy L. Gilbert](#) in the [March 15, 2017](#) issue

Orlando Gallardo was 15 when his mother decided it was worth the risk to send her youngest child across the border of Mexico to give him a chance at a better future.

“My mother always worried about me; she pushed me to get an education,” he said.

Gallardo had an older brother who was a U.S. citizen living in Iowa. He agreed to take parental rights and responsibilities for his youngest brother and filed the papers to get legal status for Gallardo.

“Just coming to the U.S. as an ordinary person is very difficult—I got denied,” he said. “My mother and brother made a decision I should just come to the U.S. without documents, that it was my best shot.”

During his harrowing journey into the United States, at one point he waited in a freezing river naked and at another point was afraid of being abandoned in a hotel with strangers and no food.

Gallardo, now 33, is associate pastor of United Methodist Trinity Community Church in Kansas City. He believes his mother’s prayers got him to this point in his life. He counts it as divine intervention that he was able to attend high school in Waterloo, Iowa, college at the University of Northern Iowa, and seminary at the Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City.

He became a recipient of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals when President Barack Obama signed the executive order in 2012.

DACA allowed certain undocumented young people brought to the United States as children to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and eligibility for a work permit.

During the campaign, Donald Trump promised to terminate amnesty programs issued by President Obama. The fate of DACA is now unknown.

If Gallardo is deported, he may have to return to Mexico for as long as ten years. He has petitioned for a waiver from that ban. Gallardo is also working to make his church a sanctuary church that would shelter anyone threatened with deportation.

“With DACA, I was able to answer my call to ministry,” he said. “I know a lot of DACA recipients that have been able to develop themselves, and they are really afraid now.”

Nearly 120,000 young people with DACA status, also known as Dreamers because they had lobbied for the DREAM Act, a more comprehensive piece of legislation, are awaiting a response from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services about the status of their applications for initial or continued inclusion in the DACA program, according to data released in September.

The Homeland Security Department is continuing to accept and process requests.

“There is justifiable fear among those who have DACA about their future,” said Rob Rutland-Brown, executive director of National Justice for Our Neighbors, a United Methodist immigration ministry that offers free legal assistance to immigrants. “Will they lose their work authorization? Will the government use their personal information against them? What happens when their DACA expires?”

The organization is not helping people apply to DACA at this point because of the cost and risk of applying. Rutland-Brown said the organization’s sites across the country are “receiving an unprecedented amount of calls not just from those with DACA, but from immigrants in general about what their options will be in the Trump administration.” —United Methodist News Service