

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM



"Every man and woman may be regarded as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father" — Pope Benedict XVI

Congress should reform of our immigration laws. The Church has taken a position on immigration because, besides being an economic, social, and legal issue, it is also a humanitarian one, and, ultimately has moral implications.

To see the full picture, we must examine the impact of a broken immigration system on our fellow human beings, the migrants themselves.

The human consequences of an immigration system are apparent. Families are separated; migrants exploited by unscrupulous employers and smugglers; and human beings, desperate to survive, perish in the American desert. Moreover, as our nation benefits from the hard work of undocumented workers, we do not extend them basic workplace or legal protections at the same time some scapegoat them for our social ills.

Because of its harmful impact on human life and human dignity, the U.S. bishops have stated that the status quo is immoral and have called for comprehensive reform of the U.S. immigration system.

The American bishops call for a legalization program which is

- **workable and includes a fair and realistic path to citizenship for the 11-12 million undocumented in the country**
- **a new worker program which provides participants a meaningful opportunity to obtain permanent residency**
- **a temporary worker program to allow migrant workers to enter safely and humanely**
- **family-based immigration reform that allows families to be reunited more quickly**

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt. 25-35).

While Catholics and others of good will may disagree with this remedy, it represents, in the view of the U.S. bishops, the most effective, humane, and practical approach to solving our immigration crisis. Some Catholics and other commentators have argued that undocumented workers and their families should not receive legal status because they live outside the law and are "law breakers."

This is not a question, however, of what is legal but what is right. Many Christians agree that if a law or practice is immoral -- such as forcing doctors to perform abortions -- they will defy that law. Current immigration laws cannot be considered moral.

"The so-called "illegals" are so not because they wish to defy the law; but, because the law does not provide them with any channels to regularize their status in our country – which needs their labor: they are not breaking the law, the law is breaking them." Most Reverend Thomas Wenski, Bishop of Orlando



ARCHDIOCESE
OF PORTLAND
IN OREGON

Office of Life, Justice, and Peace

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

Politics and Catholic social teaching

You may question the appropriateness of the Office of Justice and Peace commenting on immigration reform, which has political undertones. As the U.S. Bishops wrote, “All public policy issues---abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research, poverty reduction, and immigration reform---have political aspects to them. The Church is well within Her rights to speak out on public policy issues of moral consequence and often does. In fact, the Church has a moral obligation to speak out on issues which impact human dignity and human life.”

In advocating on behalf of migrants, immigrants, and refugees, it is important to understand that the Catholic position is based on Catholic social teaching and the following principles:

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Call to Family, Community and Participation

Economic Effects of Immigrant Workers

Current U.S. immigration laws contain many flaws: We do not penalize employers who hire illegal immigrants. U.S. immigration law fails to provide legal channels for these workers to migrate safely and legally. Work visas for low-skilled workers are absurdly small compared to demand – 5,000 per year in the permanent system and 66,000 per year in the temporary one. Family unity visas can be even scarcer, with waiting times as long as ten years for Mexican immediate family members to be reunited.

The intent of immigrant workers is to work and support their families and the effect is that they support the U.S. economy by working in important industries in need of laborers. For example, leaders in the home building industry estimate that, if the undocumented workforce left the United States, housing construction would be delayed six to eight months and housing costs would increase 30 to 40 percent. In the health care industry, immigrant workers are relied on heavily to provide care to the elderly and other infirm patients. According to the Department of Labor, the demand for foreign-born workers in these industries and others will increase dramatically in the years ahead.

Authorized and unauthorized immigrants boost the wages of 90% of native U.S. workers. Unauthorized immigrants provide a net gain of \$7 billion dollars to the Social Security system each year. Unauthorized immigrants are ineligible for most state and federal public benefits. Many unauthorized immigrants are low-wage employees whose hard work has helped produce more affordable goods for all U.S. consumers. Deporting these workers will lead to labor shortages that will increase the costs of U.S. goods. Immigrants are also consumers themselves.

Given these realities, it is important that the U.S. immigration system be changed to reflect the contributions of immigrant workers and to protect their rights. By providing undocumented workers legal status and a path to citizenship, they would be better able to assert their rights in the workplace, improving working conditions and wages for all workers, including U.S. workers.

Comprehensive immigration reform is a humane solution to our immigration crisis as well, because it enables immigrants and their families to remain together and to fully contribute their talents to their communities without fear. It also would help reduce the deaths of migrants who die in the desert.

Perhaps most importantly, our elected officials must examine the root causes of migration and work with sending countries to create jobs for migrants in their home communities. This is the long-term solution to our immigration crisis that the erection of a 700-mile border fence, recently passed by Congress, will not provide.



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace

COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

“[America,] continue to welcome the immigrants who join your ranks today, to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrow and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home. This, indeed, is what your fellow countrymen have done for generations. From the beginning, they have opened their doors to the tired, the poor, the ‘huddled masses yearning to breathe free.’ These are the people whom America has made her own.” — Pope Benedict XVI

Persons on the move—refugees, migrants, immigrants—are special in the eyes of God:

As we welcome the stranger into our midst, we welcome Christ Himself, for in the face of the migrant, immigrant, and refugee, we must see the face of Christ. In the Gospel of Luke, this is made clear in the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24: 13-15), as they become witnesses to the Truth by welcoming the stranger, who is Christ.

In January, 2003, the U.S. bishops issued the pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*. In it, the U.S. bishops articulated five principles that govern how the Church responds to public policy proposals relating to immigration, including: “when persons are unable to find work and support themselves and their families, they have a right to migrate to other countries and work. This right is not absolute, as stated by Pope John XXIII, when he said this right to emigrate applies when “there are just reasons for it.” In the current condition of the world, in which global poverty is rampant and political unrest has resulted in wars and persecution, migrants who are forced to leave their homes out of necessity and seek only to survive and support their families must be given special consideration.”

The issue of immigration elicits strong opinions and emotions on both sides. It is time to tone down the rhetoric and focus on solutions. It is imperative that both parties and both chambers of Congress work hard to produce a bill which creates an immigration system predicated on the rule of law but which upholds values which all Americans cherish—hard work, opportunity, and compassion.

Prayers for Migrants & Refugees

Lord Jesus, when you multiplied the loaves and fishes, you provided more than food for the body, you offered us the gift of yourself, the gift which satisfies every hunger and quenches every thirst! Your disciples were filled with fear and doubt, but you poured out your love and compassion on the migrant crowd, welcoming them as brothers and sisters.

Lord Jesus, today you call us to welcome the members of God's family who come to our land to escape oppression, poverty, persecution, violence, and war. Like your disciples, we too are filled with fear and doubt and even suspicion. We build barriers in our hearts and in our minds.

Lord Jesus, help us by your grace,

To banish fear from our hearts, that we may embrace each of your children as our own brother and sister;

To welcome migrants and refugees with joy and generosity, while responding to their many needs;

To realize that you call all people to your holy mountain to learn the ways of peace and justice;

To share of our abundance as you spread a banquet before us;

To give witness to your love for all people, as we celebrate the many gifts they bring.

We praise you and give you thanks for the family you have called together from so many people. We see in this human family a reflection of the divine unity of the one Most Holy Trinity in whom we make our prayer: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



ARCHDIOCESE
OF PORTLAND
IN OREGON

Office of Life, Justice, and Peace