

Immigrant Access to Education

Lack of education is as serious as lack of food; the illiterate is a starved spirit. When someone learns how to read and write, he is equipped to do a job and to shoulder a profession, to develop self confidence and realize that he can progress along with others... Literacy is the first and most basic tool for personal enrichment and social integration; and it is society's most valuable tool for furthering development and economic progress. (*Pope Paul VI, On the Development of Peoples*)

Church teaching

- ★ We cannot insist too much on the duty of giving foreigners a hospitable reception. It is a duty imposed by human solidarity and by Christian charity, and it is incumbent upon families and educational institutions in the host nations. (*Pope Paul VI, On the Development of Peoples*)
- ★ All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education. (*Pope Paul VI, Declaration on Christian Education*)
- ★ The exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognize one another as persons. Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all. The intermediate groups, in their turn, should not selfishly insist on their particular interests, but respect the interests of others. (*Pope John Paul II, On Social Concern*)
- ★ Institutions in host countries must keep careful watch to prevent the spread of the temptation to exploit foreign laborers, denying them the same rights enjoyed by nationals, rights that are to be guaranteed to all without discrimination. Regulating immigration according to criteria of equity and balance is one of the indispensable conditions for ensuring that immigrants are integrated into society with the guarantees required by recognition of their human dignity. Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life. (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, 298*)

Resources

- ★ **The Dream Act** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/mrs/dream.shtml)
- ★ **Texas Catholic Conference** Education page (www.TXcatholic.org/ed.asp)
- ★ **Justice for Immigrants** (USCCB) (www.JusticeForImmigrants.org)
- ★ **Migration and Refugee Services** (USCCB) (www.USCCB.org/mrs/)
- ★ **Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml)

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The Texas Catholic Conference promotes the Catholic Teaching that all people have a right to education and that a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his or her ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which each person is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, each will share. Therefore we oppose any efforts to reduce access to education for immigrants.

Duties of Government Regarding Immigration Law

In the realm of immigration law all governments have two essential duties, both of which must be carried out and neither of which can be ignored. The first duty is to welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the dignity and rights of the human person. Persons have the right to immigrate and thus government must accommodate this right to the greatest extent possible, consistent with its other obligations to the common good. The right to immigrate is therefore a qualified, rather than an absolute right. Nevertheless, all nations and especially financially blessed nations are called to make every possible effort to assist persons who are compelled by their circumstances to migrate.

The second duty of government is to secure its border and enforce immigration law for the sake of the common good, including the safety and well-being of the nation's inhabitants and the rule of law. Sovereign nations thus have the right and the responsibility to enforce immigration laws and all persons must respect and obey the legitimate exercise of this authority. For their part, immigrants are called to obey the law and carry out their civic duties in furtherance of the common good.

The DREAM Act

Acting on our belief that all people have a right to education, the Texas Catholic Conference, in following the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, supports the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2007, known as the DREAM Act.

The intent of the DREAM Act is to provide legal status and educational opportunity to those who entered the United States as minor children. The DREAM Act has two major provisions which are discussed in more detail herein: (1) it creates a tiered system granting legal status to undocumented aliens who arrived in the United States before age 16; and (2) it repeals current law so as to allow public universities to grant in-state tuition to undocumented aliens.

We support the central tenet of the DREAM Act – that undocumented minors of good character might earn legal status through education or military service.

In Congressional testimony, Bishop Thomas Wenski of the USCCB Committee on Migration and Refugee Services made the following remarks concerning the DREAM Act: "The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) represents another bipartisan initiative that would allow some undocumented students to be eligible for in-state tuition and legal status as permanent legal residents. Having entered the United States as very young children, often through no fault of their own, these students have contributed to their schools and communities. Many have lived in the United States for years."

ⁱ "The DREAM Act." Office of Migration & Refugee Policy. <<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/dream.shtml>>.