

Immigration

Why are we involved? Fundamentally it is because it is our Gospel mandate, our instruction from our Savior to “welcome the stranger.” In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ teaches us that salvation is gained by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and welcoming the stranger, for “what you have done to the least of my brothers, you have done unto me.” He teaches us in the parable of the Good Samaritan that we must help all of our fellow human beings, even though they may be different from us in many respects. (*Cardinal Mahony, Bishops Call For Comprehensive Immigration Reform*)

Church teaching

- ★ The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2241*)
- ★ In our view, any comprehensive immigration reform legislation must include:
 - a viable path to permanent residency for the undocumented population;
 - a new worker program that includes appropriate worker protections, wage levels, and an opportunity to earn permanent residency;
 - reductions in family reunification backlogs;
 - the restoration of due process protections lost in the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA); and
 - policies that address the root causes of migration, such as economic development in sending countries. (*Letter from Texas Catholic Conference to US Senators, May 2007*)
- ★ Immigration can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it. In the modern world, where there are still grave inequalities between rich countries and poor countries, and where advances in communications quickly reduce distances, the immigration of people looking for a better life is on the increase. These people come from less privileged areas of the earth and their arrival in developed countries is often perceived as a threat to the high levels of well-being achieved thanks to decades of economic growth. In most cases, however, immigrants fill a labor need which would otherwise remain unfilled in sectors and territories where the local workforce is insufficient or unwilling to engage in the work in question. (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 297*)

Resources

- ★ **Texas Catholic Conference** Immigration page (www.TXcatholic.org/immigration.asp)
- ★ **Justice for Immigrants** (USCCB) (www.JusticeForImmigrants.org)
- ★ **Migration and Refugee Services** (USCCB) (www.USCCB.org/mrs/)
- ★ **Comprehensive Immigration Reform** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/mrs/legal.shtml)
- ★ **Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml)
(Last updated August 5, 2008)

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Immigrants are primarily drawn to the United States by either the explicit or implicit promise of employment in several U.S. industries including, but not limited to, the agriculture, construction, and service industries. Moreover, the stagnant Mexican economy makes it difficult (and often, impossible) for such persons to make a living and provide for their families. Survival has thus become an urgent reason for unauthorized immigration.

In addition, the length of time it takes to obtain a U.S. visa has led many persons to choose to enter the United States without one. Significant backlogs in the U.S. visa system and a shortage of available visas have added to the delay. Moreover, these delays are difficult to bear for those who wish to reunite with family members already residing in the United States.

Furthermore, historically the United States' border and interior enforcement has been inconsistent and thus failed to discourage illegal border crossings. At the federal level, the United States has lacked at some times the will and at other times the consensus to enforce immigration law in any uniform or sustained fashion. Moreover, in the absence of strong federal leadership, state and local authorities have pursued disparate immigration policies. The result has been a nation and a society that has not adequately established and maintained the rule of law and consequently has not deterred unauthorized migration at the southern border.

Key elements of Comprehensive Immigration Reform advocated by the Bishops are:

Earned Legalization: An earned legalization program with a path to citizenship would require unauthorized workers to work for several years, take English courses, and pay a fine in order to participate in the program. Such a program would help stabilize the workforce, promote family unity, and bring a large population "out of the shadows," as members of their communities.

Enforcement: The Bishops support the legitimate and important role of the United States government in enforcing immigration law at the border and in the interior. The Bishops also believe that by replacing illegal migration with legal migration, law enforcement will be better able to focus upon those who truly threaten public safety: drug and human traffickers, smugglers, and would-be terrorists. Any enforcement measures must be targeted, proportional, and humane.

Future Worker Program: A worker program to permit foreign-born workers to enter the country safely and legally would help reduce illegal immigration and the loss of life in the American desert. Any program should include workplace protections, living wage levels, safeguards against the displacement of U.S. workers, and family unity.

Family-based immigration reform: It currently takes years for family members to be reunited through the family-based legal immigration system. This leads to family breakdown and, in some cases, illegal immigration. Changes in the family-based immigration should be made to increase the number of family visas available and reduce family reunification waiting times.

Addressing Root Causes: Congress should examine the root causes of migration, such as wage inequities and the lack of job opportunities in sending countries, and seek long-term solutions. The antidote to the problem of illegal immigration is sustainable economic development in sending countries. Ideally, migration should be driven by choice, not necessity.

Restoration of Due Process Rights: Due process rights taken away by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) should be restored, particularly the use of judicial discretion in deportation proceedings.

ⁱComprehensive Immigration Reform." Office of Migration & Refugee Policy. Migration & Refugee Services. <<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/legal.shtml>>.