



Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
JUSTICE, PEACE, & INTEGRITY OF CREATION



Toward Compassionate and Just Immigration Reform



September 2010

[Missionary Oblates JPIC office resource on Comprehensive Immigration Reform.](#)



BACK TO THE BORDER

Let us begin with the obvious; the recent Arizona's law S.B.1070 pattern of legislating in the immigration arena has created a provocative climate of anger and fear nationwide. Everyday, immigrant families and children in the United States are negatively affected by the current broken immigration system. Despite all these, the U.S. has long been a country of immigrants, with waves of immigration from different parts of the world.

As people of faith, we cannot stand while families are separated and immigrant workers are treated both unjustly and inhumanely. There are currently 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the shadows of society, in fear of deportation and separation from their families and loved ones.

Today, we may be struck by the growing diversity of peoples and languages in our midst. Perhaps I sometimes feel frightened, sometimes angry. Is the country or neighborhood in which I grew up changing?

And more questions continue to arise; Are those who immigrate to the US taking over? Why don't they speak English? Moreover, why can't they just get in line like everybody else? How we answer these questions inform how we respond to the broken immigration system.

"Luis had lived and worked in the U.S for ten years. His wife and three children live him. Early in 2008, Luis was pulled over for a routine traffic stop by Phoenix Police. Having no drivers' license, Luis was turned over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Because he refused to sign voluntary deportation papers, he sat in jail for six months before being deported in August. On September 15, Luis was found dead in the Arizona border desert.

Trying to get back to his wife, his seven year old, his four old and three month old baby daughter he had never met, he died of dehydration and exposure. Luis is just one the 183 people remains were found along the Arizona border in 2008. This does not include those found in the three other U.S.-Mexico borders states or the thousands found in the years since the inventions of North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) and the walls. And no one knows how many thousands more are never found".

Source: A New Path towards human Immigration Policy – American Friends and Service Committee, September 2009)

An historical pastoral letter issued by Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico, *Strangers No Longer: Together on a journey of Hope*, acknowledges that the current immigration reform is badly in need of reform and that a comprehensive approach is required to fix the problem.

Discussion of the current broken immigration system elicits a range of rationales, fears and emotions. Catholic teaching on 'work' insists that human beings share in God's creation through their work, and defends the sanctity of the family. That is why the Catholic Church supports immigration reform. It is a pro-family and pro-life issue.



UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES IN U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY

The current immigration system does not reflect America's best values and is not working for anyone: for families, justice system, employers who want to treat their workers fairly or for national economy. Millions of immigrants in United States cannot "just get in line" to gain legal status as some would suggest. Others wait decades to be reunited with loved ones.

-Source: *"Raising the Floor for American Workers: The Economic Benefits of Comprehensive Immigration Reform"*

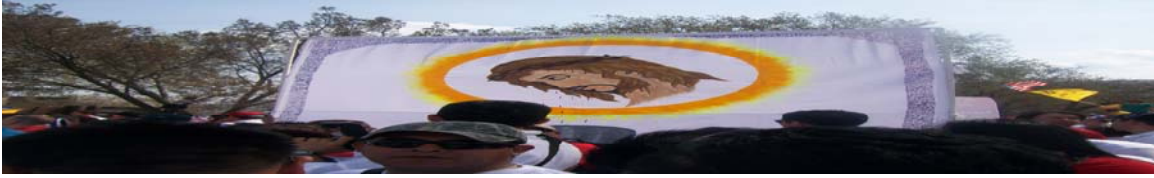
Discussion of the current broken immigration system elicits a range of rationales, fears and emotions. Beneath the anger are personal stories, diverse views and solutions for fixing the system, as well as traces of tolerance and empathy. Catholic teaching on 'work' insists that human beings share in God's creation through their work, and defends the sanctity of the family. That is why the Catholic Church supports immigration reform. It is a pro-family and pro-life issue.

While comprehensive immigration reform has some vocal opponents, the majority of American voters support comprehensive immigration reform, a position that has not wavered in the face of an economic downturn. Support for immigration reform has been good amongst Americans.

In 2007, the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that 63% of Americans supported an immigration reform policy that would provide a way for undocumented immigrants currently in the United States gain legal residency by passing a background check, paying a fine and holding a job.

Again, according to the latest research by the Beneson Strategy Group poll for America's Voice, 87 percent of Americans supports three of the major elements of comprehensive immigration reform, which includes creating a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who register with the government, meet requirements, pay taxes, and study English.

A recent study, entitled *The Economic Benefits of Comprehensive Immigration Reform* conducted by University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has found that comprehensive immigration reform would add an estimated 1.5 trillion U.S. dollars to the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) over 10 years.



A VOICE OF FAITH FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM.

The Catholic Church believes that the current U.S immigration system is broken and needs to be reformed in all aspects, or comprehensively. This would include a path to citizenship for 11-12 undocumented in the country; a temporary worker program to allow migrant workers to enter safely and humanely; and family based-immigration reform, which allows families to be reunited more quickly. The Church also teaches that root causes of migration- namely global economic disparities - needs to be addressed.

- Justice for Immigrants, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate have history of serving immigrant communities throughout the United States. We advocate for the dignity and rights of all immigrants. We stand in solidarity with all migrants on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border. We believe U.S. immigration policy should be created with compassion and respect for human rights. We believe any comprehensive immigration reform will restore the rule of law, unite families, and insure fair treatment of all workers.

The Missionary Oblates JPIC office is committed to providing education resources and advocacy actions on immigration and border issues. We believe that comprehensive immigration reform, humane treatment of migrants, safe and secure border communities and smart national security policies should be viewed as mutually reinforcing, not mutually exclusive principles.

The Oblates invite you to join in solidarity and support for immigration reform by calling on the Obama Administration and 111th Congress to pass Comprehensive Immigration Reform in 2009. Oblate JPIC office recommends the following principles for reform:

- Make family unity and reunification the cornerstone of the U.S. immigration system.
- Address the status of undocumented workers currently living in the United States.
- Recognize that root causes of migration lie in environmental and economic inequities.
- Improve conditions in detention centers for immigrants.
- Pass the Border Security and Responsibility Act of 2009 (HR 2076) to restore the rule of law and protect communities, private property, and national parks and wildlife refuges from damage caused by the border wall.



SHINE THE LIGHT FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM.

Given the choice, most of immigrants would prefer to stay with families in their countries of origin. Yet, every day thousands of immigrants are faced with the difficult decision to leave loved ones behind to seek a better life elsewhere. Lack of economic opportunity to provide for their families, partly due to U.S.-supported economic policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is what is behind much of the migration to the United States.

On December 15, Congressmen Solomon Ortiz (D-TX) and Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) introduced H.R. 4321: Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009 (CIR ASAP), in the House of Representatives with an impressive 87 original co-sponsors. CIR ASAP lays out many of the realistic solutions for which faith communities been advocating—including incorporating the Reuniting Families Act and the DREAM Act, two of our advocacy pushes for this year.

Legislation on Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Support the Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009 (H.R. 4321). This bill would help families stay together, address inhumane detention center conditions, protect workers who assert their rights from employer attacks, and provide a realistic pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, while improving border security. Please contact your Representative today and urge him/her to cosponsor H.R. 4321:

PRINCIPLES FOR COMPREHENSIVE BORDER POLICY

- a) A Moratorium on all current and future border construction.
- b) Improved training for existing border patrol agents on human and civil rights and due process.
- c) An evaluation and recommendations to mitigate the harmful impacts of enforcement-only measures to migrants and border communities; findings should be shared with Congress and the public.
- d) United States and Mexico actively protect human rights of migrants and pursue justice for any abuses against migrants.
- e) The United States must improve coordination among federal and state partners to address human trafficking in the border region



Comprehensive Immigration Reform Is Good for Families, Economy and the Border.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform helps families.

Problem: Approximately five million American children live with at least one undocumented parent.

Solution: CIR Keep American families together. This is important for the sanctity of family, the essential institution for the development of healthy and strong communities.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform helps all workers

Problem: Outdated immigration system denies an orderly process for immigrants to enter legally or legalize their status and prevents communities from tapping valuable contributors to society and economy.

Solution: Immigration reform is a vital component for building real economic security, contributing to a shared prosperity agenda that maintains and improves wages and working conditions in the United States and in other countries.

Immigration Reform will reduce undocumented Immigration.

Problem: Enforcing a flawed immigration system has wasted tax dollars, frustrated the public, and created an underground labor force living in the fear.

Solution: Comprehensive Immigration Reform is only way to reduce undocumented immigration because people seeking work and family unification will then enter the United State legally. Undocumented Immigrants already here will rectify their status through an earned process.

Immigration Reform will strengthen U.S economy.

Problem: A shrinking U.S. workforce and increase congressional spending have created high government deficits

Solution: Comprehensive Reform would sustain economic recovery by increasing productivity, consumption and the tax base. Legalization of the undocumented is economically smart and morally right.



STRANGERS TO NEIGHBORS: PROPHETIC VOICES

Our task will not be an easy one, as the present political culture does not lend itself to addressing controversial yet arguable issues as immigration. Our cause however, is right and true, not only for millions of immigrants in our country but for the welfare of the nation.

-Cardinal Roger Mahony, March 19, 2010.

Our Christian faith calls us to welcome the stranger and offer hospitality and justice to the migrants and refugees, regardless of status. Immigration is a core issue in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As members of a Church with immigrants, and roots in immigrant churches in a nation of immigrants, we participate in Christ's mission of love, community and friendship to the stranger.

The Scripture remind us in Leviticus 19:33-34 when God tells the Israelites, "Do not mistreat foreigners living in your land, but treat them just as you treat your own citizens. Love foreigners as you love yourselves, because you were foreigners one time in Egypt." In the New Testament, treatment of the stranger is a common theme. The Holy Family was forced to flee to Egypt. The Gospel expresses clearly Jesus' teaching on how to treat strangers.

In Matthew 25: 37 we hear a call from Jesus, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me." The vulnerability of strangers is a reminder of our dependence on the kindness of God and instructs us to act towards the stranger as God acts towards us.

In *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II condemns the mistreatment of migrant or seasonal workers in light of the fundamental principle of Catholic economic ethics: "The hierarchy of values and the profound meaning of work itself require that capital should be at the service of labor and not labor at the service of capital."

Pope Benedict XVI continues to remind Catholics to avoid discrimination and welcome the stranger. Cardinal Francis George OMI, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), speaking at the conference's 2009 annual spring meeting, called congressional leaders to work together to enact immigration reform legislation before the end of the year.



TIME FOR COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM IS NOW

Comprehensive Immigration Reform that legalizes currently unauthorized immigrants and creates flexible legal limits on future immigration in the context of full labor rights would help American workers and American Economy. It would add \$1.5 trillion to the United States' GDP over 10 years. It also boasts wages for both native-born and newly legalized immigrant workers. Mass deportation of approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S would amount to a \$2.6 trillion loss in GDP over the 10 years.

-Source: ["Raising the Floor for American Workers: The Economic Benefits of Comprehensive Immigration Reform"](#)

History has proven that walls are not solutions to economic disparities between nations. The American people want Congress to get back to doing the people's business and pass immigration reform.

Given the choice, most of immigrants would prefer to stay with families in their countries of origin. Yet, every day thousands of immigrants are faced with the difficult decision to leave loved ones behind to seek a better life elsewhere. Lack of economic opportunity to provide for their families, partly due to U.S.-supported economic policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is what is behind much of the migration to the United States.

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Address a Root Cause of Migration: Support the Jubilee Act

The United States Congress must enact the Jubilee Act (H.R 4405) which will broaden debt cancellation; allowing poor countries to invest more in education, health and public infrastructure. Nations with high external debt are forced to spend budgets on debt servicing instead of on maintenance of social safe nets and on poverty reduction. Good opportunities to move out poverty locally will reduce the number of people who are forced to seek economic opportunity in the United States



U.S.-MEXICO BORDER MIGRANT DEATHS AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

"There was famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, since the famine in the land was severe." **Gen 12:10 (NAB)**

Many migrants have lost their lives in the deserts of the U.S.–Mexico borderlands trying to make their way into the United States. These tragic and unnecessary deaths must stop. The border blockade strategy has militarized the U.S.–Mexico border, which drives migrants into remote desert regions, yet has failed to curtail the flow of immigrants into the United States. Catholic Social Teaching affirms a right to national security.

In 2006 Congress enacted the Secure Fence Act which authorized Homeland Security to build a costly 700–mile wall along the U.S.–Mexico border. The border wall fails to account for the reasons people migrate and is very harmful to the environment, particularly wildlife.

In April 2008, the Department of Homeland Security began using a blanket waiver of environmental and land management laws along 470 miles of the U.S.–Mexico border in order to speed construction of the fence. Militarization of the borderlands has pushed migrants into more isolated and remote stretches of the desert and mountains. Enforcement has led to the neglect of the human and civil rights of migrants and citizens of local communities along the border

Wasted Resources and Increased Deaths.

The U.S./Mexico border wall and other deterrence strategies have cost taxpayers billions, led to the deaths of thousands of migrants and diverted resources away from efforts to build safer communities. Immigration reform must facilitate an orderly process for migration, allowing resources to be focused on serious security concerns and dangerous activities such as drug smuggling and human trafficking.

Smart bills the Border Security and Responsibility Act of 2009(HR2076) would require the Department of Homeland Security to consult with federal land managers and state, local, and tribal governments when pursuing methods to secure our nation's borders. In addition, H. R. 2076 would repeal the REAL ID Act waiver authority, which allows for the waiver of laws that impend border construction.



IMMIGRANTS IN DETENTIONS: DIGNITY NOT DETENTION

They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These people are Jews and are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us Romans to adopt or practice." They threw them into prison and instructed the jailer to guard them securely. [Acts 16: 21 - 23](#)

The U.S Homeland security ICE) detains asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking and other vulnerable migrants for months, even years, when more effective and humane alternative programs exist. In 2009, more than 38, 000 immigrants were detained at an annual cost of nearly \$2 billion. Poor oversight of facilities and insufficient medical treatment cause severe hardship and in some cases, even death for migrants in detention. Immigration reform must include enforceable detention standards and expansion of cost – effective and humane alternatives to current detention programs.

Detention Watch Network (DWN) has launched a campaign: “Dignity Not Detention: Preserving Human Rights and Restoring Justice” to stop the expansion of immigrant detention nationally. Current Legislation on Immigration Detention

- Support Immigration Oversight and Fairness Act (H.R 1215); this bill requires improved conditions in detention facilities.
- Support Child Citizen Protection Act (H.R 182); this bill would restore discretion to immigration judges to decide whether or not to deport a parent of a U.S.– born child (who is therefore a citizen), based on whether that deportation would cause tremendous hardship to the child.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The average cost of detaining an immigrant is approximately \$122 per person/ per day. Alternatives to detention, which generally include a combination of reporting and electronic monitoring, are effective and significantly cheaper, with some programs costing as little as \$12 per day.
- As a result of this surge in detention and deportation, immigrants are suffering poor conditions and abuse in detention facilities across the country and families are being separated often for life while the private prison industry and county jailers are reaping huge profits.

–Source: [Detention Watch Network \(DWN\)](#)

Talking Points for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- **As people of faith, our Christian values call us to stand in solidarity with the poor,** the marginalized and the strangers among us who are often demonized and abused by hateful speech and inhumane policies. All immigrants deserve to be treated with dignity.
- **The immigration system is badly broken:** It splits our families and hurts American communities. Smart immigration reform will allow this country's 12 million immigrants to step forward and fully contribute to our economy and society.
- **Now is the time for comprehensive immigration reform.** Too many immigrants' families are already separated by borders and ripped apart by deportations. American families know that the immigration system is broken and needs reform.
- **Comprehensive immigration reform will protect all workers** and allow migrants to come and go safely across the border and create a legal path for those undocumented workers who wish to stay. The growth of America's economy depends on a stable workforce with labor rights.
- **We need just and humane comprehensive immigration reform** that, in a moral and pragmatic way, addresses a complex situation that will not be solved by simply talking tough and pouring more money into building security fences.

Questions for Reflection

1. How can we support immigrants in the United States to live and work with dignity?
2. Given the other pressing needs facing Americans, why should U.S. Congress give time and resources to the immigration issue right now?
3. Why should faith communities be concerned about the current U.S. Immigration policy?