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**THE QUESTION OF IMMIGRATION
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (1)**

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Introduction

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) – This first Fides Dossier on the Question of Immigration in the United States of America, opens with an overall view; an illustration of the socio-economic situation in the country which have encouraged immigration since the first settlements and an analysis of the policies employed over the years to regulate a vast movement of people, will precede the examination of a far more complex situation today, with the country facing enormous migratory challenges of the new millennium, lacking the necessary legislation, and in the grip of serious economic crisis and widespread social malcontent.

With regard to tougher measures taken in recent years to regulate the migratory immigration, an emblematic case is the situation on the US-Mexico border, where the latest strategies of closure culminated in the approval by the US Congress of a proposal to build a 700 mile wall along the border. The United States Catholic Bishops' Conference, together with the whole local Catholic community, has firmly condemned the ineffectiveness and violence of these measures. For many years the Catholic Bishops of America have strenuously fought for migrants and against systems of repression, actively involved in promoting immigration reforms which encourage legality and respect for human rights.

Historical and economic origin of immigration in the United States

“ I have had various ad limina visits from Bishops of Central America and also from South America, and I have seen the breadth of this problem, especially the serious problem of the break-up of families. And this is really dangerous for the social, moral and human fabric of these Countries. However, it is necessary to distinguish between measures to be taken straight away and long-term solutions. The fundamental solution is that there should no longer be any need to emigrate because there are sufficient jobs in the homeland, a self-sufficient social fabric, so that there is no longer any need to emigrate [...].And I would also like to speak to the President on this point, because it is above all the United States that must help these countries to develop. [...]Then, short-term measures: it is very important to help families in particular. In the light of the conversations I have had with Bishops about the main problems, it appears that families should be protected rather than destroyed. What can be done should be done”. Pope Benedict XVI said this during a transatlantic flight to the United States on 15 April 2008 in an interview, in response to a question posed by Mexican journalist Andrés Leonardo Beltramo Alvarez about "the increasing anti-immigration movement in society: the situation of immigrants is marked by forms of precariousness and discrimination"

Great migratory movements are extremely complicated processes, necessary painful and, sad to say, inevitable. Although the long term goal, as Benedict XVI underlined, should be to ensure no one is forced to leave his or her homeland because of dire need, hunger or poverty, the urgency of the issue demands immediate resolutions and decisive measures. The past of the United States and its present day complexity demands serious attention, in terms of history, geography, society, economy. Immigration is a constitutive element in the United States of America, a country of continual change and rich in economic and social contents still globally decisive. Always a desired destination, for the past four centuries the United States has represented a pole of attraction for peoples in crisis, men and women who decided to abandon their homeland for various reasons, including political persecution, religious intolerance, or the natural desire to survive or to improve one's destiny.

Migratory waves have happened over a wide span of time, stretching from the epoch of the colonies down to today, in a country still in need of satisfactory immigration reforms.

If the “American myth” existed substantially during the entire migratory experience, as we see from literature and cinema which narrated its essential traits, it cannot be denied that also for the history of the United States, immigration represented a founding period. From 1892 to 1954 (when it ended), the principal port of arrival and sorting centre for immigrants to the United States was Ellis Island, the island in the port of New York – today a permanent Immigration Museum - where in those years more than twenty million would-be immigrants were carefully examined by police officers and medical doctors to ascertain the physical fitness required for entrance to the country.

The multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural society of America today cannot and must not forget that she is the result of a process of *nation building* which was far from easy. Looking at events from the earliest times it is helpful to note that the native peoples of those territories which are today the United States and Canada were not geographically stable, they were not farmers, for the simple reason that they had no notion of private property: land – for the American Indians - was essentially a collective good. And with a false and dramatic distortion of the significance, European settlers in the new territories, considered north America a no-man's land, an 'empty' region which could and should be built up, cultivated and reshaped at will and according to the needs and the customs of the new arrivals.

From the early 1700s, migratory waves began to flow towards the New World mainly from England. Whole families as well as individuals, most of them poor, decided to make the Atlantic crossing filled with hope; many, unable to pay for the journey, borrowed the money promising to pay the debt with labour, in forced servitude combined indifferently with desperation, desire, and urgent need of a better future. This sort of more or less voluntary servitude was soon replaced with deportation en masse of Africans from the colonies, but despite this guaranteed free slave labour, the immigration phenomenon continued to grow as time passed with new motivations and new circumstances, such as the quest for political or religious freedom for many fleeing oppression and revolutions, and the great economic opportunities which those lands appeared to offer. The eighteenth century was in this sense a most important one for European immigration especially, but not only: between 1814 and 1860 almost 5 million people arrived in the United States from the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, countries which encouraged the exodus of farmers and craftsmen, whose conditions had degenerated due to strong demographic pressure, major economic changes, the industrial revolution, which had left those sectors in crisis. What is more, for the countries of origin immigration was a safety valve for social tension.

Besides movements from Europe, in those years there were consistent Asian migrations mainly from China and Japan. However post-colonial American society was unwilling to accept diversity and change: at the beginning of the 1800s at least three quarters of the population was of white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant (WASP) descent, and the arrival of persons of a different ethnic origin, for example Asians, gave rise to aversion among the majority, provoking social hatred. Nativists formed movements calling for immigration restrictions and more rigid rules for obtaining citizenship. In 1845, for example, the Native American Party unsuccessfully proposed that immigration of Catholics should be prohibited, while other organisations called for Catholics to be banned from public responsibilities. Chinese immigrants were tolerated as long as they supplied the labour necessary for building transcontinental railways, but as soon as they tried to move into other sectors they were regarded as dangerous rivals and even provoked intimidation and lynching.

In those same years of the second half of the 18th century, while Mexico was defeated in a war with the United States (1846-1848), and the border between the two countries was moved further

south, part of the territory and about 80,000 Mexicans passed under new rule. Nevertheless the people never became really integrated: the Mexicans were immediately robbed of their land almost systematically, despite the fact that land possession had been guaranteed by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which marked the end of the war. Mexicans, for the WASP, were second class whites, not fully “civilised”, and therefore liable to discrimination and abuse. The vicinity of the two countries was to mark a massive migratory flow northwards - which still continues today, with alternate vicissitudes – with a movement which makes headlines in news reports on illegal immigration, injustice, abuse and violation of the human rights of migrants.

From the 20th century to today: History and Politics

Steam at the end of the 1800s, drastically shortened oceanic distances allowing the arrival in America of immigrants from the East, from the Mediterranean, from southern and eastern Europe. In general, the migratory flows of 20th century reflect the great movements of world populations. Firstly, from the last decade of the 1800 until the outbreak of World War I, immigration en masse from southern and eastern Europe, which in a few years brought 15 million people to the United States. Most of these were unskilled workers, unemployed in their own country, attracted by the industrial boom in the New World, and whose countries of origin encouraged emigration. In the meantime, religious persecution in the early 1900s drove Jews to leave Russia and eastern Europe, Armenians to flee the Ottoman Empire to escape genocide. The same was true for Mexicans fleeing a Revolution, and offered refuge in the United States. For Asians things went differently: the Chinese were officially excluded in 1882 with the *Chinese Exclusion Act*, while the Japanese landed on Angel Island immigration station in the Bay of San Francisco.

Between 1880 and 1930, more than 27 million people entered the United States, about 20 million of these through Ellis Island.

There were concrete work opportunities mainly in the urban contexts of the North East where immigrants were massively employed in building and industry. In oil, chemical and rubber plants, two thirds of the labour force was non-American; and in the steel, textiles, building and meat canning industries, immigrants worked back-breaking hours. In those years, Ellis Island opened the gates of the great cities of America: in the first two decades of the 1900s, the population of New York increased by 2 million, while other remarkable metropolitan metamorphosis took place. The arrival en masse of southern and eastern Europeans, with different cultures, languages and customs, however, plunged American society into crisis, exasperating intolerance and restricting the model par excellence of whites of Anglo Saxon protestant origin. In 1924 new migrant selection rules were introduced and a system of quota immigration per country was started.

In those years the Catholic community in the United States began to provide assistance for migrants and refugees. At the beginning of the 20th century this assistance was organised at the local diocesan and parish level, but by 1920, under the auspices of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), the Catholic Bishops of the United States had set up an Immigration Department at the national level. Between 1920 and 1930, the Department, present also on Ellis Island, had already assisted over 100,000 immigrants and after World War II and the approval in 1948 of the *Displaced Persons Admissions Act* (a law which admitted refugees), the local Catholic community guaranteed assistance and all the necessary services to over 100,000 European refugees.

As regards to the border with Mexico, already in the early 1900s Mexican workers began to arrive in south western states offering cheap labour mainly in the farming sector. The US government encouraged this “informal” temporary, illegal immigration, since it was functional for

the country's economy, particularly in the years when war enlisted soldiers from the nation's labour force. Just after it had entered the war in 1942, the United States signed a first agreement with Mexico *Bracero Program* (*bracero* meaning “farm worker”, or more precisely. “temporary farm worker”), which regulated the entrance of Mexican workers who, at least formally, were guaranteed a minimum wage and acceptable living conditions. At the end of the war, the flow ebbed, stopping altogether in December 1947, once the demobilisation of the armed forces was complete.

Nevertheless temporary Mexican workers continued to enter the United States, especially at harvest time. The absence of an official agreement between the two countries, due to the excessively low minimum wage proposed by Washington, was never a real impediment, and the cunning of land owners was undeterred even when the Mexican authorities refused to issue visas for the United States. One example: in October 1948: due to a scarcity of pickers, cotton in Texas was rotting. The border police allowed about 7,000 Mexicans to cross the frontier at El Paso; they stopped them because they had no papers and then released them taking their identity on word and sent them to federal labour offices, where they were distributed to the plantations: the needs of the economy dictated law and federal norms had to adapt. Similar situations arose with the War in Korea (1950-1953), and illegal immigrant workers were repatriated every time there were periods of recession, or a return of the soldiers. This is the case of the historic “ *wetback* operation ” (*wetback*: an illegal migrant who swam across the Rio Grande into Texas), started in 1954 under President Eisenhower, which led to the forced repatriation of over one million illegal Mexican workers: the moment American citizens were out of work, rather than a resource for the economy, illegal Mexican workers were seen as a threat.

With changes in the global political arrangement, the country's new needs and no few complications due to the Cold War, in 1965, under President Lyndon Johnson, the quota system was abrogated and replaced with a new immigration law, the *Hart-Celler Act*, with socially and economically different criteria, such as family reunification, investment capacity, diploma of studies or profession. Those were the difficult years of the war in Vietnam, the fall of Saigon (1975), the overthrowing of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia (1979), of dictatorships in Latin America. About 400,000 Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians sought refuge in the United States; and roughly the same number of anti-Castro Cubans requested and received asylum in the United States between 1965 and 1980. In the 1950s the Catholic Church in the US and its Immigration Department assisted numerous migrants with legal assistance and the process of visa and citizenship documentation, until finally, after the establishment of the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) in 1965, a Department for migration and refugees was opened, today the Migration and Refugee Services (MRS), which also dealt with protection for political refugees with a special office in Miami for migrants and refugees from Cuba and Haiti. By 1975 in dioceses across the nation, the MRS had assisted at least 800,000 refugees.

In the meantime, in keeping with the new ways of world politics, in 1980, under President Carter, came the approval of the *Refugee Act* which lowered the annual immigrant maximum but allowed a reserved quota for refugees, introducing for the first time in the United States the right of asylum, according to the definition formulated by the United Nations Organisation, a right recognised not only to persons in another country but also those already living in the country, in some cases illegally. Despite the good intention, the *Refugee Act* was labelled with partiality: in 1992, 96 per cent of asylum requests from Cuban refugees were accepted, compared with only 11 per cent of requests coming from Haitians, probably because of the non Communist nature of Haiti's authoritarian regime. A sort of “contingent ethics”, we might say, due to the economic, political and social circumstances of the times.

The times of unlimited immigration were over. But the necessity to open the borders was felt once again; in 1990, the *Immigration Act* raised the annual maximum entrance number and instituted a visa assignment lottery, with a quota of what were termed “diversity visas”, also to help those countries under-represented in migratory flows until then. Restrictions on HIV virus carriers and members of a Communist Party were lifted and knowledge of the English language was no longer an indispensable prerequisite; on the other hand the new regulations substantially increased funds to reinforce Border Patrol, a first sign of the harsher immigration policies to come.

Political and commercial relations between Mexico and the United States

The exponential growth of the Hispanic presence in the United States in the last thirty years of the 20th century— circa 300 per cent, between 1970 and 2000 - met with no little concern in the US government and in public opinion. Certainly the nature and dimension of the US-Mexico land border rendered this flow unending, and the steady increase in the numbers of illegal immigrants demonstrated that effective control was impossible. On the other hand, not even the institution of a free-trade area sanctioned by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in force since 1 January 1994, to regulate goods and capital, said anything about the circulation of persons, or did anything to find a solution to the problem of migrants. Indeed, precisely in the 1990s, the competition of multinational companies and a capitalistic agriculture, inflicted a severe blow on Mexico's economy, causing a rise in the unemployment rate, a substantial drop in industry wage levels and economic growth at minimum terms. The NAFTA, intended to bridle these tendencies, on the contrary, encouraged them.

The agreement enabled large US companies to rely for the assembly of their products on Mexican workers called *maquiladoras*. The parts are imported from the US into Mexico in these factories from which – in a regime of total fiscal exemption - the end product is exported. Work is intense, at a minimum cost for the company owners - usually American - and seriously lacking in respect for the rights and security of the workers involved, obviously Mexican. Women, the highest percentage, have no special rights not even in pregnancy, with obvious repercussions on the health of mother and child; the factories are mostly close to the US border, mainly in the Mexican states of Baja California, Sonora, Chihuahua, with evident convenience for the company owner's transport costs, but with a devastating social and environmental impact for the communities involved. The *maquiladoras* produce toxic waste, which affects first of all, the workers at a high percentage, and secondly whole towns or cities where the plants are situated. Over the years tons of toxic waste have been released, the water is polluted and concentrations of gas and environmental disasters are a constant threat. The insecurity to which the workers at these plants are exposed is maximum, and the consumption of alcohol and drugs has increased, perhaps also to support the incessant working schedule, as well as repeated violation of human dignity. Community services, schools, nurseries, healthcare structures, housing, are insufficient. Crime has increased, especially drug trafficking, and this was confirmed with the cases of Tijuana in Baja California and Ciudad Juarez in the state of Chihuahua. Border towns and the *maquiladoras* themselves, became, as the years passed, a major human trafficking crossroads and the first step in the flight northwards.

The Hispanic presence in the United States of America

Since the last century, the flow between Mexico and the United States has been undoubtedly the most impressive and inestimable migratory movement experienced by the two countries, respectively of emigration and immigration. Today this movement continues, in the certainty that, despite obstacles, suffering, struggle for human rights, for US entrepreneurs and for their country illegal immigration from Mexico has always represented a precious reserve of labour force.

Yet, no US or Mexican government has ever done enough to legalise or regulate migratory flows, pursuing ambiguous and blind policies in the face of real needs. In 1978, for example, a special amendment made available 20,000 visas, an insignificant number compared with requests for expatriation coming from a population with an annual growth rate of over 3 per cent, an increase of almost 2 million individuals to the working force every year and a domestic market unable to absorb them. In the 1970s the annual average of legal immigrants in the US was estimated at 65,000 units, compared with the presence of at least 4 million illegal immigrants. In the early 1980s the number of Mexican immigrants increased every year by about 200,000 units, even despite systematic expulsion, above all of illegal immigrants employed in industry. Between 1983 and 1987, during an important stage of growth for the US economy, the issue of illegal immigrants became unbearable; those were the years of the Reagan presidency, and in 1986 Congress gave its approval to the *Immigration Reform and Control Act* (IRCA), a law intended to prevent the repetition of this extreme situation in the future: the law established the legalisation of all foreigners who had entered the US before 1 January 1982 and who had worked at least 90 days. Penal sanctions against employers of illegal immigrants were introduced, and control on the part of police on the Mexican border was intensified. In 1988 alone, the Border Patrol captured over one million persons trying to reach the United States; but evidently, an equal number had escaped control. About 2.6 million benefited from the act of amendment, half of them Mexican, the most numerous category of illegal workers in the US. On that occasion, the US Catholic Bishops obtained permission from the INS, Immigration and Naturalization Service, for Catholic organisations and volunteers all over the country to help immigrants fill in application forms for permanent citizenship.

In the meantime with massive Hispanicisation of south western states such as California, in the early 1990s there was a recrudescence of xenophobia, particularly towards illegal immigrants from Mexico, and in a minor degree, towards those from other parts of Latin America (OTM, Other than Mexican). Illegal immigrants became a scapegoat for the recession which was happening in the United States, and they were a social problem, more than a political one. One of the harshest xenophobe demands in those years, was launched in 1994 in California: *Proposition 187*, “Save Our State initiative”, to exclude illegal immigrants from healthcare, education and other social services. The *Proposition* gained support also in other states including Illinois, Florida, Texas, New York, but it was never applied because deemed unconstitutional.

The first official act of those years was the *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* (IIRIRA) of 1996, which introduced an illegal immigrant deportation procedure, annual recruitment of at least one thousand Border Patrol agents for five years (1997-2001), stricter border protection measures, limited entrance for expelled illegal immigrants, with ulterior restrictions on admission to higher education and welfare programmes. According to the new law even minor crimes (such as shop lifting) could be a reason for deportation, to apply to residents married to American citizens or with children born on American soil. When the IIRIRA was approved it had a retroactive effect, including US residents who had committed minor crimes in the past.

This punitive strategy had started even before the new norms were approved at the federal political level. As Kevin Appleby director of the Office for Immigration Policies of the US Catholic Conference of Bishops, USCCB, told Fides, already in September 1993 “The government service for immigration, INS, Immigration and Naturalization Service, launched what was termed operation ‘Blockade’ to armour the US-Mexico border”. The operation, later renamed, “Hold the line” (or, “Stop, stay on the border line”), was inaugurated on the El Paso border in Texas, to try to stem the illegal migratory flow from Mexico which transited in that area. The plan foresaw the use of 400 agents, vehicles and helicopters for about 30 km in and around El Paso. This became a model for border closing, and was used in other crucial passageways; Tucson, Arizona, in 1994

with operation “Safeguard”; San Diego, California, in 1994 with operation “Gatekeeper”; McAllen and Laredo, Texas, in 1997 with Operation “Rio Grande”; El Centro, California, in 1998 as an extension of operation “Gatekeeper”. US government investments were exceptional, in the certainty that for illegal entrance this was a valid deterrent. As we read in the 2001 report titled “Chaos on the US-Mexico Border, a report on Migrant Crossing Deaths, Immigrant Families and Subsistence–Level Laborers”, issued by the Washington D.C. based The Catholic Legal Immigration Network INC., CLINIC, the aim of this protection system was a “multiplication of forces”. ISIS, Integrated Surveillance Information System, uses television cameras, land sensors spread in the desert and other modern electronic devices, able to transmit continually movement on the border line with GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) and GIS (Geographic Information Systems), technology to identify the exact position of every illegal movement, excluding false alarms due to the passage of cattle or wild animals.

More than ten years later we can say, figures in hand, that this strategy only increased beyond all measure the quantity of public money invested in border protection, increased the number of persons killed while attempting to cross the border line, enriched human traffickers (*smugglers*), encouraged in total ambiguity employers who apply norms similar to those of dependence in a regime of slavery, strangle illegal workers with a starvation wage and massacring working-hours, under the blackmail of non-existence.

Consequences of September 11th : “national security” and stricter migratory measures

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York, had a symbolic impact in addition to the objective consequences of the facts. The difficult count of the event's chain effects, includes a profound change in the perception that a person who is “different”, is the bearer of a mortal threat and the invisible root of a war against an unknown world and an unknown enemy.

Responsibility attributed to Islamic extremists is officially the reason for different initiatives, government and other, perpetrated against Arab and Muslim communities and against immigrants in general, with the result of a devastating war at home, in addition to the known wars abroad in Afghanistan and in Iraq. The war at home has various connotations but will certainly be remembered for sparking among Americans serious diffidence towards Arabs and Muslims in general; due to orders to arrest and in some cases to detain in the months after the attack, Arab men with visas for tourism, work or study, and measures against American citizens of Arab origin; immigrant deportation orders issued on the basis of even minor offences; and lastly, the block on immigration of young men from the Middle East and the expulsion of 6,000 Arabs illegally present in the country from 2001 onwards.

“National security” and border protection had become a political obsession: on 1 March 2003, the government set up a Department of Homeland Security (DHS), integrating the office previously responsible, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), into one of its bodies, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The new Department included the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), powerful investigative branch charged with identifying, investigating and dismantling national security weak points. The Office has delegates in all the main US embassies abroad, and special officials have ample investigative powers with regard to any other US government agency. Although attention is focused mainly on citizens of Arab origin and Muslim religion, civil freedom is restricted in many ways, with FBI interception of international telephone calls and e-mail messages, and other repercussions also in areas of

"qualified" immigration, scholars, researches, young foreigners studying in America for an advanced degree.

Nevertheless, although the Bush presidency put policies to reform immigration laws high on its agenda in order to stem the illegal flow and guarantee national security, the work started by Congress has not yet produced the desired results.

The *Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (CIRA)*, proposed by republican Senator Arlen Specter in 2006, and signed among others by the Republic Presidency candidate John McCain and democratic senator Ted Kennedy, was definitively rejected by the Senate on 28 June 2007. The reform would have legalised 12 million irregulars, working and living in the United States and denied all rights. Those who oppose this reform, wish instead for a repressive law to finance greater border protection and encourage deportation, instead of legalisation, for illegal workers. In this direction, a new Bill was proposed in November 2007: *Secure America through Verification and Enforcement Act (SAVE)*.

In the meantime, on 26 October 2006, Congress approved the *Border Secure Fence Act*, which authorised the building of a 700 mile wall along the Mexican border, the installation of advanced technology to detect presence on the border line and a higher number of Border Patrol agents.

This is the only measure regarding immigration which the present government succeeded in obtaining from Congress, with repercussions also on the Canadian border, as Fides learned from Donald Kerwin, executive director of CLINIC. Kerwin said "funds assigned for border control increased from 361 million dollars in 1993 to 1.8 billion dollars in 2006. And in the same period, the irregular population in the country almost doubled, passing from 3.9 to about 12 million". The wall, he remarked with concern, "will not stop the number of migrants, it will only move the flow to other areas making the crossing more dangerous and enriching the *smugglers*, human traffickers who simply put up their crossing prices."

Besides the construction of the wall, other initiatives taken by the present administration include: higher cost of applications for visas and citizenship and stiffer admission tests, obstacles in daily life of immigrants regarding healthcare, jobs, education. It suffices to think that irregulars were excluded from federal programmes of chemotherapy, a measure confirmed by some state administrations, but annulled and harshly condemned by the states of New Jersey, New York and Connecticut. Nevertheless, besides what goes on in Washington, local states or government may find their own solutions to the immigration emergency. A happy case refers to the city of New York, where in December 2007, the district attorney Robert Morgenthau announced the institution of the Immigrant Affairs Advisory Council, a special unit to help immigrants victims of abuse who even if they are illegal may denounce these events without fearing arrest or deportation. The measure renders less vulnerable their status. "Anyone living here must have the right to total protection of the law", said Morgenthau. The special unit includes representatives of various non-profit agencies actively involved in helping immigrants including 'Catholic Charities', an organisation of New York Catholic archdiocese, which offers assistance to the most vulnerable sections of the population.

The position of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops

The Catholic Church in the United States, with its commitment to matters concerning immigration has always worked to promote total protection of rights, making her position official in various forms: acts and declarations of US and Mexican Bishops, Catholic delegations as observers

at the US-Mexico border, and unceasing activity of Catholic associations, dioceses, individuals. During the recent apostolic journey to the United States of Benedict XVI, a joint declaration issued by the Holy See and the United States of America, released at the end of a private meeting on 16 April between the Pope and President Bush, reaffirmed interest for the issue, recognised by both the Pope and the President as critical. The declaration reads: “The Holy Father and the President discussed the situation on Latin America including, among others, the question of immigrants and the need for coordinated immigration policies, above all with regard to human treatment and the wellbeing of families”.

The position of the Catholic Church has always been clear and the precipitation of events increased in proportion her commitment with regard to policies and in the field. Since 1999, the USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services (MRS), extended its attention to the growing problem of foreign and unaccompanied minors crossing the Mexican border, beginning in 2002 to work more specifically to help victims of human trafficking. Proof of this continual concern, between 2000 and 2003 alone, three important Pastoral Letters on the question issued by the Bishops: “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity”; “Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith”; and “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope” in collaboration with the Catholic Bishops of Mexico.

In June 2004, together with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, INC., (CLINIC) the US Bishops began to work more actively towards the political goal of a global immigration reform, to which other national Catholic institutions adhered. This led to the launching of a “Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope campaign”, to mobilise institutions and individuals, to act as interlocutor with the national and international community, to maintain public attention and foster action from representatives of politics, Congress and government. The campaign was officially presented on 10 May 2005 by the then Archbishop of Washington, Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick, who listed its goals:

- educate public opinion, especially the Catholic community and its official representatives with regard to Church teaching on the question of migration and migrants;
- create political will for a concrete immigration reform;
- enact legislative and administrative reforms based on the principles pronounced by the bishops;
- form Catholic networks to assist immigrants who qualify for the advantages of the reforms.

“Like our nation, the Catholic Church in the United States is ethnically, socially and culturally varied ”, the Cardinal recalled on that occasion and he added: “We, as the Church, celebrate and embrace this diversity”. The Campaign initiatives were inspired among other things by a joint Pastoral Letter issued by the US and Mexican Bishops in 2003, “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope”, calling for the “globalisation of solidarity”.

Nevertheless the path is arduous. In June 2007 the Senate rejected the proposed *Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act* (CIRA) which would have regulated 12 million regulars and protected those who wish to emigrate, also to be united with their family. With regard to family reunion the US Bishops expressed fears, “with waiting lists which can last more than ten years”, Kevin Appleby, Director of the USCCB office for immigration policies told Fides. “The US Bishops officially requested with a revision maximum urgency of the present immigration rules, which should respect the minimum criteria of Christian morals ”. The concrete appeal, Appleby added, is for the immediate realisation of the following:

1. a programme of legalisation for all irregulars in the country;
2. a reform based on labour which includes a programme for new workers who enter the country legally and in security;
3. a reform which takes into account the family situation and the necessity of family reunion;
4. the return to the “two process” model: a just process which respects both human rights and conventions in force;
5. more long-term policies to eliminate root causes of emigration.

Appleby told Fides about another area of USCCB concern, namely, incursions on certain US factories which employ irregular workers, regardless of the impact on families, children, communities, ordered by the National Security Department and carried out by the latter's investigative arm, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The USCCB supports the proposed H.R. 5882 Law, presented by the House of Representatives. The Law establishes that visas for family reasons not assigned within a period of 12 months, should be “recaptured” and admitted for the following year, so as to reduce long waiting for family reunion. The Law would allow the reconsideration of about 93,000 family visas which would otherwise be lost in bureaucratic chaos.

The American Bishops firmly disapproved the *Border Secure Fence Act*, signed by the Bush administration in 2006 authorising the construction of a 700 mile wall between Mexico and the United States. In an official statement, Bishop Gerald R. Barnes of the diocese of San Bernardino, California, expresses “profound disappointment and sadness”. “From our point of view, the wall will not help to resolve the problem of illegal immigration. It create more problems than it solves”, said Bishop Barnes, president of the USCCB Migration Commission which coordinates the different offices of the Migration and Refugee Services, the Immigration Policies Office directed by Appleby, the Office for Pastoral Care of migrants and refugees, the Office for Refugee Programmes and the Office of the Executive Director.

The serious situation which threatens to increase the living and working conditions of illegal immigrants in the US, are concerns not only for the American Bishops, but the entire local Catholic community.

“In migrants the Church has always contemplated the image of Christ who said, ‘I was a stranger and you made me welcome’ (Mt 25:35). Their condition is, therefore, a challenge to the faith and love of believers, who are called on to heal the evils caused ”. This statement is found at number 12 of the Instruction *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (the love of Christ towards migrants), issued on 3 May 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples. The Secretary of the Council, Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, has underlined many times the importance of this pastoral document, expressing his personal fear and the fear of the Church with regard to the building of a wall between the US and Mexico and for the sad plight of Latin American immigrants in the United States. On 3 August 2007 , in an interview with a Mexican daily *El sol de Mexico*, Archbishop Marchetto said “the Catholic Church affirms the right to emigrate, with certain conditions, and the duty to be integrated into the welcoming country, to respect its laws and national identity”. While acknowledging the right to defend national borders, Marchetto stressed the value and respect for human rights as inseparable elements, recalling that “the common good includes not only the nation but the whole world. We must see the necessity of a new world order as Benedict XVI has said in line with his predecessors”. Adding that “in any case, the vision must be multidimensional, integral, and not limited to questions of security”, Archbishop Marchetto concluded by stressing the necessity of reforms, which must include, as requested by the

Bishops of the United States and Mexico, “ the way towards citizenship, family reunion and respect for the rights of workers”.

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