



On Immigration

"I want to encourage you and your communities to continue to welcome the immigrants who join your ranks today, to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrows and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home."

—Pope Benedict XVI, Celebration of Vespers and Meeting with the Bishops of the United States of America, April 2008

The Bishops Call for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

The Pew Hispanic Forum estimates that about 12 million undocumented immigrants live and work in the United States today. The motivations pushing immigrants to risk unauthorized entry into America are varied, but most hope to reunite with family members already here or to find work that will provide support for their families back home. The existing immigration system has created a growing number of persons living in this country in an unauthorized capacity, living in the shadows as they toil in jobs that would otherwise go unfilled. The Church believes that current immigration laws and policies have often led to the undermining of immigrants' human dignity and have kept families apart. The bishops of the United States have been strong supporters of comprehensive immigration reform, which includes

- A broad-based legalization (permanent residency) of the undocumented of all nationalities
- Reform of our family-based immigration system to allow family members to reunite with loved ones in the United States
- Reform of the employment-based immigration system to provide legal pathways for migrants to come and work in a safe, humane, and orderly manner
- Abandonment of the border "blockade" enforcement strategy
- Restoration of due process protections for immigrants

Distortions in the Immigration Debate

Too often, discussions surrounding illegal immigration are reduced to distortions about who undocumented immigrants are and what they want.

Some people say that undocumented immigrants don't pay taxes. In fact, undocumented immigrants pay billions of dollars in sales, income, and property taxes each year—directly if they own, and indirectly if they rent. According to the Social Security Administration (SSA), undocumented workers pay as much as \$7 billion in Social Security and Medicare taxes each year and have contributed as much as a half-trillion dollars since 1984.

Others say that immigrants don't want to learn English. In fact, while first-generation, non-English-speaking immigrants predictably have lower rates of English proficiency than native speakers, 91% of second-generation immigrants are fluent or near-fluent English speakers. By the third generation, 97% speak English fluently or near-fluently.

Still others conclude that we need to close our borders to prevent another catastrophe like 9/11. In fact, seventeen of the nineteen 9/11 terrorists were in the country legally on student visas—only two had overstayed their visas. By legalizing the undocumented population and by creating more visas for workers to enter legally, we can better know who is in the country and who is coming, thus making us safer as a nation.

To learn more about the USCCB's policy positions on issues related to immigration, please visit www.usccb.org/mrs/policypositions.shtml.

Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope

The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform

In January 2003, the Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico issued a joint pastoral letter entitled *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, which called for a “globalization of solidarity” and an overhaul of the U.S. immigration system.

The following year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Committee on Migration and the board of directors of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), resolved to make comprehensive immigration reform—with special emphasis on legalization—a major public policy priority within the Church. Many other national Catholic institutions followed suit and have also made immigration reform a policy priority.

In 2005, the Justice for Immigrants (JFI) campaign was launched with three objectives:

- Educate Catholics about the challenges that immigrants face in the United States
- Build support and work for the passage of a national comprehensive immigration reform policy that is consistent with the immigration reform principles articulated by the bishops
- Strengthen relationships between immigrant communities and dioceses across the country

In addition to the bishops’ response, a diverse group of Catholic organizations with national networks joined the JFI campaign to unite and mobilize a growing network of Catholic institutions, Catholic individuals, and other persons of good will in support of a broad legalization program and comprehensive immigration reform. Some of these Catholic organizations include the USCCB’s Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Health Association, Jesuit Conference, NETWORK, National Catholic Association of Diocesan Directors of Hispanic Ministries, CLINIC, Irish Apostolate, and Catholic Charities USA. Collaboration with other Catholic organizations will enable JFI to realize its goal to maximize the Church’s influence on the issue of immigration, consistent with

the immigration reform principles set forth in *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*.

The bishops recognize that the conditions that compel people to leave their homes out of desperation and the lack of opportunities to provide for themselves and their families must be addressed. Therefore, JFI works closely with both CRS and the Catholic Campaign Against Global Poverty, initiated by the USCCB Office of International Justice and Peace. The Global Poverty campaign and CRS seek to reduce poverty through trade, aid, and debt reforms. CRS’s work and the JFI and Global Poverty campaigns are integrally related, in that JFI addresses the rights and needs of migrants in the United States, while CRS and the Global Poverty campaign address the rights and needs of persons living in their native countries. By working in concert, JFI, CRS, and the Global Poverty campaign are creating the “globalization of solidarity” called for by the Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico.

For more information on how you can help, please visit www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

The document *On Immigrants/Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope* was developed as a resource by the Committee on Migration of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). It was reviewed by the committee chairman, Bishop John C. Wester, and has been authorized for publication by the undersigned.

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