

## A PARISH GUIDE FOR EDUCATION & ADVOCACY ON IMMIGRATION AND REFORM

There are roughly 12 million undocumented people in the US - living shadow lives. About 1.8 million are children. Another 3.1 million are US born citizens - children with at least one undocumented parent. This situation demands practical and reasonable Immigration Reform. Comprehensive Immigration Reform would provide earned legal status for un-documented immigrants and maintain family unity. The cross-border movement of people uprooted by free trade policies such as NAFTA should be at least as organized as that of economic goods flowing from the free trade deals. Yet the flow of people remains difficult and dangerous.

One lesson from the current economic recession is that policy reform in Congress is possible when there is enough political will. Congress acted quickly to bail out Wall Street banks without much partisan politics. Yet immigration reform that does not cost billions of dollars cannot make it to the President's desk.

### THE CHURCH AND IMMIGRATION

- Immigration is a core issue for the Judeo-Christian tradition. God's concern for the migrant is recalled in Exodus. For Catholics, treatment of the stranger is paramount. As members of a Church with immigrants, and roots in immigrant churches in a nation of immigrants, we participate in Christ's mission where through love, community and friendship, the stranger becomes the neighbor.
- In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love)*; Pope Benedict XVI reminds Catholics of the unbreakable connection between love of God and love of neighbor. Because God has first loved us unconditionally, we are compelled to love one another. And in loving our neighbor, we meet the person of Christ.
- "Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary" **U.S. Catholic Bishops, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope," 2003, # 38**

### OBLATE RESPONSE TO IMMIGRATION

Oblate JPIC believes the principles of Human Dignity, Option for the Poor, Solidarity, Responsibility and Common good should guide Immigration and Border reforms. We respond by being:

- A Resource for Education and Advocacy for Oblates in the United States.
- Acting in Solidarity with Immigrants.
- Calling for Congressional Action to pass Comprehensive Immigration and Border Reform.

## A MISGUIDED MYTH: BORDER WALL WILL FIX ALL IMMIGRATION ISSUES

- US Border Enforcement and militarization has undergone massive expansion since 1993; with an estimate budget for border patrol reaching \$1.9 billion. It is also a reality that local communities at the US/Mexico border have been affected by cross border drug related violence.
- The US-Mexico border wall is a controversial initiative. The wall poses a serious threat to border communities and the environment. The wall is costing \$700,000 to \$21 million per mile. In the midst of an economic recession that has taxpayers struggling, there must a smarter way to spend our money.
- We can not solve a 21<sup>st</sup> century problem with a “Wall” - a 19<sup>th</sup> century solution. The former Secretary of Homeland Security used section 102 of Real ID Act (2006) to waive federal laws to allow the wall to be built along the border without any regard for environmental protection or public health and safety.
- Oblate JPIC supports legislative action to pass a moratorium on the border wall until all social and environmental concerns are resolved. We decry the avoidable deaths of immigrants.

## GET INVOLVED: TALKING POINTS ON IMMIGRATION AND BORDER

- **America families can't wait another year without reform:** A truly comprehensive immigration reform must reunite separated families. Too many immigrant families have already been separated by borders and ripped apart by raids. American families know that the immigration system is broken and needs reform. They also know that mass deportation of undocumented workers is unrealistic.
- **America's Economy cannot wait:** A comprehensive immigration reform must demilitarize the U.S./Mexico border, allow workers to come and go safely across the border and create a path to citizenship for those undocumented workers who wish to stay. The growth of America's economy depends on a stable workforce with labor rights.
- **America's Security cannot wait:** Mere enforcement of our current border security strategy without comprehensive immigration reform is throwing money at a failed plan. We must effectively secure the borders in this post 9/11 era by creating a legal and orderly flow of immigrants across the southern border.
- **Border Communities cannot wait:** There is too much lawlessness, chaos and death. Increased border security without comprehensive immigration reform will increase migrant deaths in the desert. In the past ten years tightening border security has pushed migrants further into the desert and made them more vulnerable to human smuggling.

**George K. Ngolwe JPIC Office, April 2009**