

Pastor's Column

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“And Who Is My Neighbor?” (Luke 10:29)

The immigration issue is now in the forefront of discussion in our homes, in our workplaces, and in the media as our President proposes immigration reform legislation and Congress is in the process of creating that legislation.

Indeed, in the last week, the issue has taken to the streets!

Included in today's bulletin is a statement from the California Conference of Bishops. It is entitled “*And Who Is My Neighbor?*” (Luke 10:29). You are encouraged to read and reflect upon it as part of your Lenten prayer activity. This latest statement is grounded in our Catholic theology and tradition.

To better understand our Catholic theology and tradition as it relates to immigration issues, I share with you “**Understanding Catholic Social Teaching as it Relates to Migration – Five Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teaching Relating to Migration.**” (Taken from “*Justice for Immigrants – A Journey of Hope – The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform, Diocese of San Diego, March 2006*”):

“Although Catholic theology has always promoted human rights rooted in natural law and God's revelation, it was the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor) in 1891 that developed a systematic presentation of principles of the rights and responsibilities of people. *Rerum Novarum* commented on the situation of migrants; in later documents, popes and bishops' conferences have synthesized the Catholic theological tradition to articulate five basic principles on migration:

1. **Persons Have The Right To Find Opportunities In Their Homeland.** All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.
2. **Persons Have The Right To Migrate To Support Themselves And Their Families.** The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.
3. **Sovereign Nations Have The Right To Control Their Borders.** The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their territories but rejects such control when it is exerted merely for the purpose of acquiring additional wealth. More powerful economic nations, which have the ability to protect and feed their residents, have a stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows.
4. **Refugees And Asylum Seekers Should Be Afforded Protection.** Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status

without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.

5. **The Human Dignity And Human Rights Of Undocumented Migrants Should Be Respected.** 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.

The Catholic Church teaches that every person has basic human rights and is entitled to have basic human needs met – food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care. Undocumented persons are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous employers, and they sometimes do not complain for fear of discovery and deportation.

Current immigration policy that criminalizes the mere attempt to immigrate and imprisons immigrants who have committed no crime or who have already served a just sentence for a crime is immoral. In the Bible, God promises that our judgment will be based on our treatment of the most vulnerable. Before God we cannot excuse inhumane treatment of certain persons by claiming that their lack of legal status deprives them of rights given by the Creator.

Finally, immigration policy that allows people to live here and contribute to society, often for years, but refuses to offer them the opportunity to achieve legal status does not serve the common good. The presence of millions of people living without easy access to basic human rights and necessities is a great injustice.”

Our Diocese has a “Justice for Immigrants Committee” that can assist all Catholics in the Parishes of our Diocese to better understand the issues of immigration.

Anyone who is supportive of the California Bishops' statement on immigration reform, and would like to be more involved in immigration reform issues, please contact Sister Maureen, our Pastoral Associate, or myself.

Also Sister Maureen will be attending a citywide march for immigrant rights on Sunday, April 9, at 3pm. This event is being sponsored by the Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and will be in solidarity with cities around the United States.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Sister Maureen. More details on the event will be forthcoming.

President Bush has said many times that the issue of immigration reform is a very contentious issue. Let us pray that this issue will not further polarize our nation, but, in our goodness and generosity, pull us closer together as we seek common solutions.

We are a nation of immigrants. If we forget our roots, we will destroy our future.

F. Mike