

Pastor's Column

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The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform: Justice for Immigrants – Part 1

The issue of immigration reform is once again taking center stage in our country, especially in light of the recent legislation passed by the Arizona Legislature and signed into law by the Governor of that state.

In order to help all of us “wrap our minds” around the complexities of immigration reform, I will be including in our bulletin, for the next few weeks, resources from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) that discuss a wide range of topics related to immigration.

I encourage you to take time to read this information in order to inform yourself as best as possible as our country prepares itself for the upcoming debate on immigration reform.

Whatever viewpoint we may presently have on this issue, we must find ways to come together in order to secure passage of humane and comprehensive immigration legislation.

Included as an insert in this week's bulletin, you will find: *Catholic Bishops Call for Comprehensive Immigration Reform*.

Please take time to read it, and please follow along for the next several weeks to read the various USCCB articles that will be given to you to help you reflect upon the official position of the Catholic Church.

Fr. Mike



JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS *a journey of hope*



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Catholic Bishops' Call for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

In a landmark pastoral letter issued by the Catholic bishops of Mexico and the United States, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, the bishops acknowledge that the current immigration system is badly in need of reform and that a comprehensive approach to fixing it is required. The bishops offer a comprehensive set of recommendations for changing U.S. laws and policies to reflect the principles contained in Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching and to bring about a more humane and just immigration system in the United States.

The bishops' call for reforms includes the following elements:

Global anti-poverty efforts

Many migrants are compelled to leave their homes out of economic necessity in order to provide even the most basic of needs for themselves and their families. The bishops call for international efforts designed to create conditions in which people do not have to leave their homes out of necessity. Trade, international economic aid, debt relief, and other types of economic policies should be pursued that result in people not having to migrate in desperation in order to survive.

Expanded opportunities to reunify families

U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents must endure many years of separation from close family members who they want to join them in the United States. The backlogs of available visas for family members results in waits of five, ten, fifteen, and more years of waiting for a visa to become available. The bishops call for a reduction of the pending backlog and more visas available for family reunification purposes.

Temporary worker program

The U.S. economy depends upon the labor provided by migrants. Therefore, many migrants come to the United States to fill jobs. The bishops acknowledge this reality and call for a more rationale and humane system by which laborers from other countries can enter the country legally to fill positions in the labor force, including on a temporary basis. Because the U.S. experience with temporary workers programs has been fraught with abuses, the bishops call for a



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temporary worker program that includes:

- Path to permanent residency which is achievable/verifiable
- Family unity which allows immediate family members to join worker
- Job portability which allows workers to change employers
- Labor protections which apply to U.S. workers
- Enforcement mechanisms and resources to enforce worker's rights
- Wages and benefits which do not undercut domestic workers
- Mobility between U.S. and homeland and within U.S.
- Labor-market test to ensure U.S. workers are not harmed

Broad-based legalization

For those in this country without proper immigration documentation, opportunities should be provided for them to obtain legalization if they can demonstrate good moral character and have built up equities in this country. Such an “earned” legalization should be achievable and independently verifiable.

Restoration of due process

In recent years, immigrants have been subject to laws and policies that debase our country's fundamental commitment to individual liberties and due process. These laws and policies, including detention for months without charges, secret hearings, and ethnic profiling, signal a sea of change in our government's policies and attitudes towards immigrants. We are a nation with a long, rich tradition of welcoming newcomers. Government policies that unfairly and inappropriately confuse immigration with terrorism do not make us safer, tarnish our heritage, and damage our standing abroad. The bishops urge our government to revisit these laws and to make the appropriate changes consistent with due process rights.

Also in this context, the bishops call for reforming our system for responding to asylum seekers and considering their claims. Today, asylum seekers must meet a very high bar for demonstrating their claim for asylum and are incarcerated in the meantime. The bishops believe that our nation can both protect its citizens from terrorists and remain a safe haven for legitimate asylum seekers fleeing persecution.