

Pastor's Column

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Immigration: Your Story, Your Family's Story, The Whole Story

"Comprehensive Immigration Reform" has been discussed in our country for the last several decades now, but our leaders have not been successful in coming together to make it happen.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has called for comprehensive immigration reform and has published much significant information on behalf of this reform.

This information from the USCCB was published in a six part series that ran in our Parish Bulletin from June 6 to July 11, 2010.

It is important to keep this issue alive in our country in the hope that soon there will be enough of our leaders from all sectors of society who will have the moral and political courage to work through this issue.

To this end, Faith Works, an interfaith network of congregations, of which St. Thomas More is a member, is sponsoring an immigration information morning. It is scheduled for Saturday, October 16, from 9:00am-12:00 noon at St. Francis Church. A flyer is included as an insert in this week-end's Bulletin.

The focus of this event is to put a "human face" on the issue by allowing people to tell their immigration stories. We are a nation of immigrants. All of us have family immigration stories to tell.

I am the grandson of Polish immigrants. Both sets of my grandparents were born in Poland and migrated to the United States. My father's parents settled in a Polish community 100 miles north of Detroit, Michigan. It was in that farming community that my dad was born and raised—speaking Polish his entire childhood and adolescence. Although, born in the United States, he did not speak English until he moved to Detroit at the age of 21!

Isn't it just natural and normal that immigrants with the same background congregate together in the same place or area to give each other support as they begin to adapt to life in the USA? When one comes across the border, there isn't a magic wand that is waved that gives immigrants the ability to speak English immediately or to adapt to many new ways of life. It takes time. It takes a generation. We seem to have lost this sense of patience in recent times when we talk about immigration issues.

My mother's mother never spoke English. She remained in the house as mother to nine children and tended to family and home. Were people upset with her because she didn't speak English? No. People knew it would take a generation for the family to integrate into life here in the United States. All her children went to public schools, learned English, continued to speak Polish at a variety of times and in various circumstances, and worshipped in ethnic Parishes in which Masses and all sacraments were celebrated in Polish and English.

On both sides of my family, it took a generation. Today all of my cousins and I are fully integrated into life as proud Americans, speaking English, and bemoaning the fact that we are not as fluent in Polish as we would like!

This is just a piece of my family immigration story. Most of us have such stories. Take time to come to the gathering on October 16 to share these stories and, as a first step toward comprehensive immigration reform, to put a human face on the issue.

Fr. Mike