

VOICES THAT CHALLENGE

Presented by the Social Justice Ministry of
St. John the Baptist Parish and St. Andrew's Parish

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We Believe

Human Life is Sacred.

We are called to family,
community and participation

Every person has a fundamental
right to life and to those things
necessary for human dignity.

The needs of the poor and
vulnerable come first.

Work has dignity and the
economy must serve people,
not the other way around.

We are one human family
whatever our national, racial,
ethnic, economic and ideological
differences.

Care for the earth and the
environment is an expression
of our love for God's creation.

***The above seven themes
are at the heart of our
Catholic Social
Teaching***

***"Amen I say to you, whatever
you did for one of these least
brothers of mine, you did for
me."***
Mt 25:40

Catholic Social Teaching: The Immigration Debate

" . . . I was a stranger and you welcomed me . . . " (Mt 25:35). Today the illegal migrant comes before us like that 'stranger' in whom Jesus asks to be recognized. To welcome him and to show him solidarity is a duty of hospitality and fidelity to the Christian identity itself. *Pope John Paul II, Message for World Migration Day, 1996.*

The Church has always taught about God's mercy toward the poor and the alienated. However, with the realities of immigration in the United States, these teachings are given further clarification through the many documents and teachings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). In January 2011, they issued a statement on the **Catholic Church's Position on Immigration Reform**. The elements of their proposal for Comprehensive Immigration Reform were outlined:

Earned Legalization: An earned legalization program would allow foreign nationals of good moral character who are living in the United States to apply to adjust their status to obtain lawful permanent residence. Such a program would create an eventual path to citizenship, requiring applicants to complete and pass background checks, pay a fine, and establish eligibility for resident status to participate in the program. Such a program would help stabilize the workforce, promote family unity and bring a large population "out of the shadows," as members of their communities.

Future Worker Program: A worker program to permit foreign-born workers to enter the country safely and legally would help reduce illegal immigration and the loss of life in the American desert. Any program should include workplace protections, living wage levels, safeguards against the displacement of U.S. workers, and family unity.

Family Based Immigration Reform: It currently takes years for family members to be reunited through the family-based legal immigration system. This leads to family breakdown and, in some cases, illegal immigration. Changes in family-based immigration should be made to increase the number of family visas available and reduce family reunification waiting times. (See below)

Restoration of Due Process Rights: Due process rights taken away by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) should be restored. For example, the three and ten year bars to reentry should be eliminated.

Addressing Root Causes: Congress should examine the root causes of migration, such as under-development and poverty in sending countries, and seek long-term solutions. The antidote to the problem of illegal immigration is sustainable economic development in sending countries. In an ideal world, migration should be driven by choice, not necessity.

Enforcement: The U.S. Catholic Bishops accept the legitimate role of the U.S. government in intercepting unauthorized migrants who attempt to travel to the United States. The Bishops also believe that by increasing lawful means for migrants to enter, live and work in the United States, law enforcement will be better able to focus upon those who truly threaten public safety: drug and human traffickers, smugglers and would-be terrorists. Any enforcement measures must be targeted, proportional and humane.

RECENT PROGRESS While **Comprehensive Immigration Reform** is still a long way off, the process of implementing two administrative policies has begun; namely:

Prosecutorial Discretion - In August 2011 the Department of Homeland Security announced that with the Department of Justice, they will participate in an interagency working group to review the nearly 300,000 removal (deportation) cases presently pending to identify those that are deemed "high priority" and at the same time identify potentially "low priority" cases to determine whether they merit an exercise of prosecutorial discretion. If they do they may be closed and removed from the active immigration court docket.

Family Unity Waiver Process - In January of this year Immigration officials announced a proposal that would keep undocumented spouses and children of U.S. citizens together as they apply for permanent residence (green card). Current law requires most such immigrants to return to their home countries in order to receive their legal visas. The new proposal would allow them to obtain a provisional waiver in the United States prior to leaving. Having the waiver in hand will enable them to depart knowing that they will almost certainly be allowed to return. The goal is to substantially reduce the time that U.S. citizens are separated from the spouse or children when such separations would cause an extreme hardship.

For further information please visit www.usccb.org or www.justiceforimmigrants.org

