



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

"We are one family under God"

IMMIGRATION Q&A

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Questions and Answers Regarding the Catholic Church's Position on Immigration

What, in a nutshell, is the U.S. bishops' position on immigration reform?

The Catholic Church believes that the current U.S. immigration system is broken and needs to be reformed in all aspects, or, comprehensively. This would include a path to citizenship for the 11-12 million undocumented in the country; a temporary worker program to allow migrant workers to enter safely and humanely; and family-based immigration reform which allows families to be reunited more quickly. The Church also teaches that the root causes of migration—namely, global economic disparities---need to be addressed.

The Church has taken a position on immigration because, besides being an economic, social, and legal issue, it is also a humanitarian one, and, ultimately has moral implications. Each day church social service programs, hospitals, schools, and parishes see the human consequences of a broken system: families are divided, migrant workers are exploited and abused, and human beings die in the desert. This impacts human dignity and human life and should be addressed.

Migration is a major theme in the Gospels. Jesus and the Holy Family were refugees who fled the terror of Herod and Jesus, the Son of Man, was an itinerant teacher while on Earth, with "no place to lay His Head." Jesus also taught us to "welcome the stranger," for "what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me." (Matthew: 25:35-41)

Does the Church have the right to speak out on immigration reform, which is largely a political issue?

All public policy issues---abortion, euthanasia, stem cell research, poverty reduction, and immigration reform---have both political and moral aspects to them. The Church is well within Her rights to speak out on public policy issues of moral consequence and often does. In fact, the Church has a moral obligation to speak out on issues which impact human dignity and human life. In the immigration area, the Church brings special expertise to the table because we are an immigrant church and we have helped assist immigrants assimilate into the nation for years. Moreover, many immigrant families who attend Catholic parishes would be positively impacted by immigration reform and a legalization program.



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Would providing legal status and possible citizenship to undocumented immigrants be considered an "amnesty?"

First, "amnesty" is not a dirty word from the Catholic perspective. Forgiveness and compassion are values that Catholics, as well as Americans, promote and cherish. Nevertheless, current proposals regarding how to deal with the undocumented population cannot properly be understood as an amnesty because they require undocumented immigrants to pay their debt to society for breaking the law by paying their back taxes, paying a fine, continuing to work, learning English, and waiting their turn in the line.

Some charge that the Church is in favor of a nation without borders, that we support illegal immigration. Some also say that by providing legal status to the undocumented, we are rewarding law breaking. How do you respond to these issues?

The Church has always supported the right of a sovereign nation to secure its borders, although it should be done in a manner that protects human life, to the greatest degree possible. The Church does not favor illegal immigration in any sense. It is not good for the migrant, who often suffers abuse by smugglers, exploitation in the workplace, and even death in the desert. It is not good for society or for local communities, because it creates a permanent underclass with no rights and no opportunity to assert them. That is why the Church supports the creation of legal avenues for migration and legal status for migrants.

As mentioned, the Church does not condone the breaking of laws and supports a path to citizenship that requires migrants to pay a fine and meet other requirements. Once the system is reformed, migrants should be able to enter legally and not be forced to cross illegally or overstay their visas. Currently, they have no pathways to enter the country legally, despite the need for their labor.

In general, is immigration good for our country or does it create new burdens on U.S. citizens?

Except for Native Americans, we are all descendants of immigrants or are immigrants ourselves. Immigrants have helped build the great nation we enjoy today. While opponents of immigration will attempt to raise the fears of U.S. citizens that immigrants today take away jobs, change the culture, and eat up public resources, the truth of the matter is that today's immigrants are no different than previous generations. They come to work hard and to support their families, not to take public resources or commit crimes. This is borne out in the majority of research studies on the subject, which conclude that, overall, immigrants are contributors to our economy and helpful to our local communities. They also bring a spiritual energy and richness which enriches our worship and Church.

Some say that letting in too many immigrants, because they are often a cheap source of labor, could hurt the wages of workers already in the country. Is this known to be true?

Immigrant workers generally do not compete with U.S. workers for unskilled jobs. Some studies show that immigrant workers may have an impact on the job status and wages of low-skilled American workers, such as high school dropouts. Overall, however, immigrant workers fill crucial jobs in important industries that



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many American will not do, such as agriculture. By enacting immigration reform, the wages of immigrant workers will increase because they will be better able to assert their rights in the workplace and because the pool of unauthorized workers will dwindle.

Won't a more generous immigration policy risk allowing terrorists and other undesirables into the United States?

Quite to the contrary. A more generous immigration policy would ensure that government authorities can identify and monitor who is coming into the country. If a migrant comes in legally, they will identify themselves to the government and be subject to background checks and criminals and would-be terrorist can be weeded out. Now, persons who come in without papers are not known to the government and their whereabouts are not known.

What level of border enforcement do the bishops see as necessary and appropriate?

The U.S. bishops believe that comprehensive immigration reform will reduce the pressure on the southern border by letting migrants who otherwise would cross the border illegally to enter legally through ports of entry, as they would more easily be able to obtain a visa to enter. This would allow border patrol officials, who have a difficult task, to better protect us from smugglers and traffickers and other criminal elements. The erection of fences along our southern border will not necessarily stop illegal immigration but could lead to migrants depending more on unscrupulous smugglers and taking more dangerous routes through the desert. The bishops also would support more enforcement in the workplace, but believe that migrant workers must be brought out of the shadows first so that all workers are in the legal system. Over the long-term, the U.S. bishops believe that economic development in sending countries will permit persons to remain in their homelands and support their families in dignity.

What can the average Catholic in the pew do to support the kind of immigration reform that the Catholic Church endorses?

They can visit the Justice for Immigrants website at justiceforimmigrants.org to obtain information on the position of the U.S. bishops and how they may contact their federal officials to support comprehensive immigration reform. They can also send an electronic postcard. Parishioners also can call your federal officials at 202-224-3121 (U.S. Senate) or 225-3121 (U.S. House of Representatives) and urge them to support immigration reform. Support from Catholic parishioners will help enact a just and humane bill.

Prepared by: Office of Migration and Refugee Policy, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops