

Know the FACTS About...

Reflections on Immigration



Key Points and Bulletin Briefs

- ✘ “As Catholic Christians, we are challenged to incorporate the lived experience of our Catholic faith in the context of our public responsibilities. In solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the human family, Christ calls us to contribute to the improvement of human welfare through works of mercy and justice. Pure Christian charity is not ideologically or politically motivated, but independent – motivated by our encounters with Christ in the sacraments. True charity is manifested when we are fully welcoming, offering Christ’s love to all without distinction.” – Bishop Paul Bradley
- ✘ On the World Day for Migrants and Refugees, Pope Benedict XVI said, “Migration shouldn’t ever be seen only as a problem, but above all as a great resource on the path of humanity.”
- ✘ Immigrants contribute to our economy. According to the Center for Labor Market Studies, the net benefit of immigration to the U.S. is nearly \$10 billion annually.
- ✘ We have a duty to seek the well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. We as Church welcome new immigrants not because they are Catholic, but because we are Catholic.
- ✘ This debate is about real people, who live in our communities, who work hard at tough jobs, who believe in the American Dream, and who strive to make life better for themselves and their children.
- ✘ America is at its best when it holds fast to the founding principles of equality, justice, and opportunity for all.
- ✘ America has demonstrated the ability and the strength to create unity in diversity.
- ✘ “Immigrants, new to our shores, call us out of our unawareness to a conversion of mind and heart through which we are able to offer a genuine and suitable welcome, to share together as brothers and sisters at the same table, and to work side by side to improve the quality of life for society’s marginalized members.” – United States Bishops
- ✘ “In the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere.” – Pope John Paul II
- ✘ Our identity as children of God unifies us: “We are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).
- ✘ “Among man’s personal rights we must include his right to enter a country in which he hopes to be able to provide more fittingly for himself and his dependents. It is therefore the duty of state officials to accept immigrants and – so far as the good of their own community, rightly understood, permits – to further the aims of those who may wish to become members of a new society.” – *Pacem in Terris* (Pope John XXIII, 1963)
- ✘ “The mission of the Church, then, as the trusted and familiar home for most of the nation’s newest arrivals, is a ministry of evangelization and service. The task of welcoming immigrants, refugees, and displaced persons into full participation in the Church and society with equal rights and duties continues the biblical understanding of the justice of God reaching out to all peoples.” – United States Bishops
- ✘ “The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 2241).



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Reflections on Immigration

As a nation, we are in the midst of a multifaceted immigration crisis. Our immigration system needs to be renovated and remedied. The safety, economic, social, and cultural implications must be thoroughly reviewed. While this task may seem like the responsibility of secular governments, the Catholic Church is in a key position to bear witness to the consequences of a broken immigration system and to advocate for just reform.

The Catholic Church in the United States is home to more than 59 ethnic groups from throughout the world, including Asia, Africa, the Near East, Latin America, and European nations. The Catholic Church and her social service agencies have a long history of welcoming and assimilating waves of immigrants and refugees who have helped to build our nation. That tradition continues to this day with 158 Catholic immigration programs operating throughout the country.

The Catholic Church has two concurrent responsibilities to bring to this debate. First, the Catholic Church must deal with the pragmatic issues of justice involved in immigration reform. The Church must do everything in her power to affirm solutions to the immigration crisis that ensure basic human rights and uphold the dignity of every human person.

Second, and equally as important, the Church must challenge each and every one of us to search our souls with respect to our attitudes and actions toward immigrants and the needy. Every Christian faces a compelling challenge today: to move beyond mistrust and prejudice, and to live up to the calling of Christ's teachings to love our neighbors and to welcome those who are strangers to us.

As for the pragmatic concerns, the Catholic Church is committed to the adoption of a revised immigration system that recognizes that all people deserve due process protections and legal avenues to protect them from exploitation. In response to the immigration dilemma, the Church is calling for a compassionate understanding of the problems associated with undocumented immigrants who are already here and are in need.

The Catholic Church does not encourage or support illegal immigration. Clearly, illegal immigration is not good for the migrant or for society: it intrinsically fosters a two-tiered society that relegates a group of people to survive as a permanent underclass existing in the shadows of society.

The Bishops of the United States are calling for the fair and efficient implementation of comprehensive immigration reform that includes: an earned legalization program that gives migrant workers and their families the opportunity to obtain permanent residency; a new worker visa program that protects the labor rights of both U.S. and foreign-born workers and gives participants the opportunity to earn permanent residency; reform that ensures that families are reunited in a timely fashion; restoration of due process protections for immigrants; homeland security protections for the nation; and policies that address the root causes of migration by securing a global environment where all human dignity is recognized and conditions of extreme poverty and persecution are reduced to the point of elimination.

Beyond these pragmatic matters, Catholics are called to uphold the essential philosophy of justice present in Church teachings. To be complete,

our reform must address not only what is written into law, but how completely we love our neighbors. The Bible repeatedly calls us to the awesome challenge to love all people: in the Book of Leviticus we are instructed, "you shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have the same love for him as for yourself, you too were once aliens" (Lv 19:34); and the Gospel of John echoes numerous accounts of Jesus' new command, "As I have love you, so you should also love one another" (Jn 13: 34).

In his parable about the Good Samaritan, Jesus makes it clear that love of others cannot be an abstract concept. Jesus calls us to emulate the actions of the Good Samaritan and to aid anyone experiencing need. Our duty to undertake this task is clear when we recognize that human dignity exists – not because of our racial heritage or legal status – but because God created each of us in His image and likeness.

Many immigrants already reside in our communities and worship in our parishes, and as Christians, we must welcome them in a manner that recognizes their human dignity and does not seek to demonize those merely seeking to live in humane conditions.

Pope Benedict XVI recently reminded us that Christians must shun all forms of discrimination and welcome the stranger in our midst. This call for communion and solidarity with immigrants and refugees should compel us to recognize them as our neighbors. For this reason, the Church challenges us to take our discussions about immigration reform beyond enforcement and to include a response that is like that of the Good Samaritan. In that tradition, we must warmly open our doors and hearts to all.



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