

immigration

“As we welcome the stranger into our midst, we welcome Christ himself, for in the face of the migrant, immigrant, and refugee, we must see the face of Christ” - USCCB

WHAT EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IMMIGRATION

The Catholic position on immigration is based on fundamental Catholic social teaching derived from the gospels and statements made by the popes and bishops around the world. They are based upon, and can be summarized by, two of the most basic principles of Church teaching: the right to life and the dignity of every person.

Scripture

At the beginning of their journey in the desert as God’s people, the Lord told Israelites that they were not to harm or hurt the alien, “for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19). Likewise, in the book of Leviticus, Moses reminded the Israelites that they were to treat strangers with respect and not molest them: “Have the same love for [the stranger] as for yourself” (Leviticus 19:33-34).

We must remember that in the New Testament, Jesus himself was a refugee when as a child he fled into Egypt along with Mary and Joseph from the terror of Herod. (Matthew 2:14-15). The gospels remind us that throughout his ministry, Jesus was an itinerant, moving from place to place “with nowhere to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20). It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus instructs us, his followers, to welcome the stranger: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25:35).

The disciples on the road to Emmaus became witnesses to the truth by welcoming the stranger who, as it turned out, was the Lord Jesus himself. (Luke 24:13-15). We, too, are called to encounter the risen Christ by encountering the stranger in our midst.

Papal Teaching

*In his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), Pope John XXIII articulated the fundamental right of human beings to migrate: “every human being has the right to the freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of their country; and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate and take up residence elsewhere.”*

Pope John Paul II reaffirmed this basic teaching in an address to the New World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Immigrants in 1985: “Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to migrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in the universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men.”

In his trip to the United States, Pope Benedict XVI continued this message and called on Americans “to continue to welcome the immigrants who join your ranks today, to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrow and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home. This, indeed, is what your fellow countrymen have done for generations. From the beginning, they have opened their doors to the tired, the poor, the ‘huddled masses yearning to breathe free.’ These are the people whom America has made her own.”

immigration facts¹ COUNTERING THE MYTHS

Immigrants Don't Want to Learn English

FALSE: The development of English proficiency among non-English speaking immigrants today mirrors that of 19th and early 20th century immigration. 91% of second-generation immigrants are fluent or near fluent English-speakers.

Immigrants Don't Pay Taxes

FALSE: Undocumented immigrants do pay taxes. Between one-half and three-quarters of undocumented immigrants pay state and federal taxes. They also contribute to Medicare and provide as much as \$7 billion a year to the social security fund. Further still, undocumented workers pay sales taxes and property taxes (directly if they own property, and indirectly if they rent).

Immigrants Increase the Crime Rate

FALSE: Immigrant communities do not increase the crime rate, and immigrants actually commit fewer crimes than native-born Americans. Although the undocumented immigrant population doubled in size between 1994 and 2005, violent crime dropped by 34% and property crimes decreased by 32%. Harvard sociologist Robert Sampson has found that first generation immigrants are 45% less likely to commit violent crimes than Americanized, third-generation immigrants.

Immigrants are a Drain on The United States Economy

FALSE: The immigrant community not only is not a drain on the U.S. economy, but in fact it actually proves to be a net benefit. Research by the Cato Institute and the President's Council of Economic Advisors shows that the average immigrant pays a net \$80,000 more in taxes than that person collects in government services. For immigrants with college degrees, the net fiscal return is

\$198,000. The American Farm Bureau says that without guest workers, the U.S. economy would lose as much as \$9 billion a year in agricultural production and that 20% of current production would go overseas.

Undocumented Immigrants are a Burden on the Healthcare System

FALSE: Federal, state, and local governments spend approximately \$1.1 billion annually on healthcare costs for undocumented immigrants, aged 18-64, or approximately \$11 in taxes for each United States household. This compares to \$88 billion spent on all healthcare for non-elderly adults in the U.S. in 2000. Foreign-born individuals tend to use fewer healthcare services because they are relatively healthier than their native-born counterparts. For example, in Los Angeles County, "total medical spending on undocumented immigrants was \$887 million in 2000 – 6% of total costs, although undocumented immigrants comprise 12% of the region's residents."

¹Information obtained from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Justice for Immigrants Fact Sheet*; www.justiceforimmigrants.org

Five Principles

The U.S. bishops in their January, 2003 Pastoral Letter "Strangers No Longer: Together On The Journey Of Hope" articulated five principles that should govern how the Church responds to public policy proposals relating to immigration:

1. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
2. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
3. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.
4. Refugees and asylum-seekers should be provided protection.
5. The human rights and the human dignity of undocumented migrants should be respected.