



**Department of Migration and Refugee Services  
Office of Migration Policy & Public Affairs**

**Background on Immigration  
February 2018**

*Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age (Matthew 25:35-43). The Lord entrusts to the Church's motherly love every person forced to leave their homeland in search of a better future. This solidarity must be concretely expressed at every stage of the migratory experience – from departure through journey to arrival and return. This is a great responsibility, which the Church intends to share with all believers and men and women of good will. -- Pope Francis, Message for the 104<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2018*

**BACKGROUND:**

The U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops supports legislation and administrative policies that protect the human dignity of migrants, support family unity, and provide humanitarian protections for people who are trying to escape violence in their homeland. The Church remains committed to accompanying immigrants and refugees from their point of origin, through their period of transit, and following their arrival at their destination point. Unfortunately, there has been a notable shift toward immigration restriction, which has proven very challenging to protecting and assisting immigrants and refugees.

The Administration has sought to significantly expand immigration enforcement efforts, including an increase in immigrant detention, a commitment to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, an increase in family separation, restrictions on asylum, and an expansion in internal enforcement. Additionally, legislative efforts have been endorsed by the White House that would reduce annual legal immigration by up to 50%, and shift to a merit based admissions system at the expense of the family-based immigration system that is currently in place. All of these measures require Congressional approval in the form of passage of legislation or appropriating of funds.

Alongside these attempted efforts, the President has successfully imposed significant reductions in the number of refugees admitted into the United States which has resulted in the weakening of the refugee resettlement system that has had widespread, bipartisan support for more than three decades. Additionally, the Administration recently terminated the Central American Minors (CAM) program, which provided refugee and humanitarian protection to children fleeing persecution and violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

On September 5, 2017, President Trump announced that he was rescinding the [DACA](#) program, established several years earlier. This [program](#) allowed nearly 800,000 young migrants who were brought into the country illegally the opportunity to work and go to school in the U.S. without having to fear being deported. It is incumbent that Congress acts expeditiously to help individuals who are set to lose DACA protections.

[Temporary Protected Status](#) (TPS) was established by Congress through the Immigration Act of 1990. TPS is intended to protect foreign nationals in the United States from being returned to their home countries if the home country became unsafe to return to during the time in which the individuals were in the U.S. In recent months, the Trump Administration has ended TPS protections for countries including Haiti, Nicaragua and El Salvador, with the TPS status for other national groups currently up for further consideration.

## **THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' POSITION:**

Catholic social teaching provides the foundation for how the Church addresses issues related to migration; this teaching is rooted in both Scripture and in the moral teaching of the Church that has developed over the course of many centuries. Understanding how the Church's teaching tradition informs its position on migration will help Catholics and others of good will better understand the rationale undergirding the bishops approach to migration. The U.S.-Mexican bishops' pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, highlights some of the key principles that they believe ought to inform discussions related to migration, particularly insofar as they pertain to the development of legislative and administrative action. These principles include the conviction that:

### **1. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.**

All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.

### **2. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.**

The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When people cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.

### **3. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.**

The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their territories but rejects such control when it is exerted merely for acquiring additional wealth. More powerful economic nations, which can protect and feed their residents, have a stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows.

### **4. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.**

Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.

### **5. The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.**

Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often, they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.

**RESOURCES:** Visit: [www.usccb.org/about/mrs](http://www.usccb.org/about/mrs) or [www.justiceformigrants.org](http://www.justiceformigrants.org). Contact: *Melissa Hastings*, Department of Migration and Refugee Services, [MHastings@usccb.org](mailto:MHastings@usccb.org)