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CALIFORNIA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS' STATEMENT ON IMMIGRATION REFORM

And who is my neighbor? (Luke 10:29)

Recent news stories have highlighted the polarization that the issue of immigration has caused in our state and our nation. Although it is apparent that our immigration policy needs reform, we must not forget that virtually all immigrants to this country – both documented and undocumented – are here in search of jobs and opportunity for themselves and their families.

In California, immigrants live among us. They serve us in our restaurants and hotels, clean our homes, harvest our produce, tend to our yards, and provide us with technical expertise and factory labor. Many are entrepreneurs creating employment opportunities for others. Their children go to our schools. Their families go to our Churches. They are our neighbors.

We recall Christ's teaching parable of the Good Samaritan which he offered in response to the question: And who is my neighbor? Jesus made the Samaritan – who was looked upon as an unholy outcast and foreigner – the model because he came to the aid of the injured man who was a stranger to him. Now is our chance to come to the aid of those among us who come from a foreign land. Now is our chance to care about the strangers whom Jesus called our neighbors!

*"I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (Matthew 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 Christian identity itself."
– Pope John Paul II, Annual Message for World Migration Day, 1996.*

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We understand the polarization and frustration over this issue because the status quo serves neither the immigrant nor the citizenry well. For that reason we call on people of faith to welcome the strangers among us as our neighbors and we implore our national legislators to give us a law that reforms immigration in a way that protects human dignity and promotes the common good. In light of the Gospel, we call for an answer that is humane, realistic and responsible while also serving our nation's economic and security needs.

Specifically we call for:

- Reform that includes earned legalization for the undocumented and their families, a temporary worker program, and timely family reunification policies;
- Restoration of due process protections for immigrants;
- Policy directions that address the root causes – so that migrants can remain in their home countries and support themselves and their families; and
- Reform that does *not* include sanctions for those who provide humanitarian aid for the undocumented.

We expect our public officials to work together in a bipartisan fashion to create a new immigration system which respects our common humanity, reflects the values of fairness, compassion and opportunity and recognizes that we *are* a nation of immigrants.

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