

# Who Are My Sisters and Brothers?

*Summary from*

***Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity***  
**A Statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops**  
*Approved unanimously November 2000*

The presence of so many people of so many different cultures and religions in so many different parts of the United States has challenged us as a Church to a profound conversion so that we can become truly a sacrament of unity. We reject the anti-immigrant stance that has become popular in different parts of our country, and the nativism, ethnocentricity, and racism that continue to reassert themselves in our communities. We are challenged to get beyond ethnic communities living side by side within our own parishes without any connection with each other. We are challenged to become an evangelizing Church open to interreligious dialogue and willing to proclaim the Gospel to those who wish to hear it. The new immigrants call most of us back to our ancestral heritage as descendants of immigrants and to our baptismal heritage as members of the body of Christ. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we are all given to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

The call to communion goes out to all members of the Church—bishops, priests, deacons, religious, lay leaders, and parishioners—to prepare themselves to receive the newcomers with a genuine spirit of welcome. Simple, grace-filled kindness and concern on the part of all parishioners to newcomers are the first steps. This can be accompanied by language and culture study as well as constant and patient efforts at intercultural communication. The integration of incoming groups is complex because of multiple Mass schedules and lack of personnel or resources, but if the receiving parish staffs and parishioners are open to the newcomers and provide a bridge to join cultures to one another, the newcomers themselves will provide the leadership and show the way to a healthy integration. Both on parish and diocesan levels, the presence of brothers and sisters from different cultures should be celebrated as a gift to the Church through well-prepared liturgies, lay leadership development programs inclusive of all, the appointment of prepared leaders of immigrant communities to parish and diocesan positions, and special efforts to help youth find their way as they experience themselves often torn between two cultures.

One successful model of unity in diversity was Encuentro 2000: Many Faces in God’s House, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ celebration for the Jubilee Year. In the materials prior to the celebration, Encuentro 2000 offered a discussion method called the “mutual invitation process,” which maximizes intercultural participation. In the celebration itself, Encuentro 2000 was an experience of the exuberance and vitality, the profound faith and devotional life of the participants. Encuentro 2000 also demonstrated that communion in a multicultural Church is a true possibility for the new millennium.

The call to solidarity can be summed up in Pope John Paul II’s Message for World Migration Day 2000: “The Church hears the suffering cry of all who are uprooted from their own land, of families forcefully separated, of those who, in the rapid changes of our day, are unable to find a stable home anywhere. She senses the anguish of those without rights, without any security, at the mercy of every kind of exploitation, and she supports them in their unhappiness” (no. 6). We bishops commit ourselves and all the members of our church communities to continue the

work of advocacy for laws that respect the human rights of immigrants and preserve the unity of the immigrant family. We encourage the extension of social services, citizenship classes, community organizing efforts that secure improved housing conditions, decent wages, better medical attention, and appropriate educational opportunities for immigrants and refugees. We advocate reform of the 1996 immigration laws that have undermined some basic human rights for immigrants. We join with others of good will in a call for legalization opportunities for the maximum number of undocumented persons, particularly those who have built equities and otherwise contributed to their communities.

In *Ecclesia in America*, Pope John Paul II calls for a “new evangelization” centered on the person of Jesus Christ. “The encounter with the living Jesus Christ’ is ‘the path to conversion, communion and solidarity” (no. 7). Such an encounter, so central to all our Jubilee Year activities, leads to a daily vision of the risen Lord, present and active in the world, especially in the poor, in the stranger, and in the migrant and refugee. These 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. In so doing, we work to bring all the children of God into a fuller communion, “the communion willed by God, begun in time and destined for completion in the fullness of the Kingdom” (*Ecclesia in America*, no. 33).

*\* Authorized unanimously by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, November, 2000.*