



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

**Background on Immigration
February 2019**

“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.” (Pope Francis, 104th 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 immigrants and refugees, support family unity, and provide humanitarian protections for people who are trying to escape violence. The Church remains committed to accompanying immigrants and refugees from their point of origin, through their migration journey, and in their destination country. Unfortunately, there has been a notable and global shift towards restrictionist immigration policies that inhibit efforts to protect and assist immigrants and refugees.

The U.S. Administration, for example, has sought to curtail and severely modify existing legal immigration programs including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and application of the public charge requirements. Simultaneously, it has attempted to significantly expand immigration enforcement efforts, including an increase in immigrant detention, a commitment to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, implementation of family separation and restrictions on asylum, and an expansion in internal enforcement. Alongside these changes, the President has successfully imposed significant reductions in the number of refugees admitted into the U.S., which has resulted in the weakening of the refugee resettlement system that has had widespread, bipartisan support for more than three decades.

On September 5, 2017, President Trump announced that he was rescinding the [DACA](#) program, originally established 2012. This [program](#) allowed nearly 800,000 young immigrants who were brought into the country undocumented the opportunity to live and contribute to the U.S. without having to fear being deported. In addition to the approximately 800,000 DACA recipients, there is an estimated larger group (including DACA recipients) of 1.8 million Dreamers, young people who did not qualify or apply for the DACA program due to age, application cost, or other reasons. Congress unsuccessfully attempted to find a legislative solution for the Dreamers during 2018. Currently, the legality of the DACA program and the rescission are being litigated in the courts. As of January 17th, the Supreme Court had not taken up the Administration’s request to hear the case regarding the legality of the program and termination. Given the uncertainty that DACA youth face, it is vital that Congress acts expeditiously to help maintain existing protections and provide a path to citizenship for Dreamers.

[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. Throughout 2017-2018, the Administration has ended TPS protections for several countries, including Haiti, Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador. Currently, it is estimated that barring legislative action or a change in administrative policy, over 300,000 TPS holders will become deportable in 2019 and 2020 and will likely face situations of family separation from their U.S. citizen children. Given the looming deadline that TPS holders face, as well as their steady contributions to the U.S. economy, local communities, and effective integration into American life and society, Congress must act to find a permanent legal solution for TPS holders as soon as possible.

“A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on everyone's part. Let's move away from a fearful and defensive attitude, from indifference and marginalization, towards a healthy attitude based on the culture of encounter.” -- Pope Francis (Message for the 104th World day of Migrants and Refugees, 2018)

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 not to migrate and instead 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 or asylum 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.justiceforimmigrants.org Contact: *Melissa Hastings, Ashley Feasley*, Migration and Refugee Services, MHastings@uscgb.org and AFeasley@uscgb.org