

## PASTORAL CONCERNS: WELCOMING CHRIST IN THE STRANGER

In addition to recommendations related to policy, the bishops recognize the primary importance of providing pastoral care for migrant communities. Scripture reminds us that in welcoming the stranger we are welcoming Christ (Mt 25:35). Catholics are thus called to work for the conversion of hearts and minds and, in doing so, to create a culture and practice of hospitality in communities receiving newly arriving migrants.

First and foremost, the Church must provide for the religious and spiritual needs of newly arriving immigrants and refugees and ensure that the sacraments and the full life of the Church are made available to people living in these communities, regardless of their legal status. Second, the Church must help to provide for the material needs of immigrants and their communities. For this reason, the bishops call on local parishes and other Catholic institutions to develop a network of social services for migrants and their families as they transition to their new life in America and, where possible, to provide affordable or free legal services to assist in the often arduous immigration process, particularly for those who are caught up in detention.

## THE JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS CAMPAIGN

In June 2004, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, along with the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), resolved to make comprehensive immigration reform—with special emphasis on legalization—a major public policy priority of the U.S. Catholic Church. A diverse group of Catholic organizations with national networks joined the U.S. Catholic bishops' Justice for Immigrants Campaign in an effort to unite and mobilize a growing network of Catholic institutions, individuals, and other persons of goodwill in support of a broad legalization program and comprehensive immigration reform. The campaign seeks to maximize the Church's influence on this issue, consistent with the immigration reform principles enunciated in *Strangers No Longer*. The objectives of the campaign are to

- Educate the public, especially the Catholic community, including Catholic public officials, about Church teaching on migration and immigrants
- Create political will for positive immigration reform
- Enact legislative and administrative reforms based on the principles articulated by the bishops
- Organize Catholic networks to assist qualified immigrants in obtaining the benefits of the reforms

Unfortunately, Congress has not as yet passed comprehensive immigration reform. It is thus important that Catholics continue to work with their legislators at both the state and national level to develop policies that respond to the needs of migrants, reform the laws so that they more adequately reflect the common good, and put into place measures that will help control migration flows in the future. For these efforts to be successful, it is imperative that Catholics and other people of goodwill assist the bishops in this task in their parishes, schools, and local communities.

## RESOURCES

Many resources, including those listed below, are available online at [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org) to assist parishes and individuals who are interested in learning more about the Catholic Church's position on immigration.

### Justice for Immigrants Campaign: We Are One Family Under God

Provides video resources, fact sheets, issue papers, and other resources related to immigration. [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org)

### National Migration Week

Includes more materials related to National Migration Week and additional resources for use in your parishes and schools. [www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/national-migration-week](http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/national-migration-week)

### Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope

The full text of the joint pastoral letter. [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope.cfm)

### USCCB Migration and Refugee Services

Offers additional information on Catholic social teaching, current information on migration and refugee policy, copies of the bishops' statements on migration, and other resources. [www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services](http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services)

To order print and DVD materials, visit [uscbbpublishing.org](http://uscbbpublishing.org), or call toll free at 800-235-8722.

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For more information and for additional resources, visit [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org) and search "National Migration Week."



Publication No. M7-373  
Washington, DC  
ISBN 978-1-60137-373-1

ISBN 978-1-60137373-1



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# We Are Strangers No Longer:

Reflections on the Tenth Anniversary  
of the Pastoral Letter on Migration of  
the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the  
United States

Migration and Refugee Services

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



In 2003, the bishops of the United States and Mexico issued a joint pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, that presented a Catholic framework for responding to the ongoing migration phenomenon in their respective countries. In doing so, the bishops offered pastoral guidance to Catholics who encounter and engage migrants living and working in their communities. The letter also suggested systematic reforms to U.S. immigration policy and presented an alternative to the existing immigration policy paradigm.

### THE FAILURE OF THE ENFORCEMENT-ONLY APPROACH IN U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY

In the two decades surrounding the pastoral letter’s publication, the United States has promoted an enforcement-only approach to unauthorized immigration. Between fiscal years 2004 and 2009, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) budget increased 82 percent, from \$6 billion to \$10.1 billion. Along with this substantial budgetary increase, CBP saw a 35 percent increase in the number of border patrol agents and support persons during that same period. These increases in border enforcement build on significant expansions in these same areas during the previous decade. For example, in 1986 the Border Patrol’s budget was \$151 million. By 2002 their budget had escalated to ten times that amount, \$1.6 billion.<sup>1</sup> Despite these enforcement-driven efforts, the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States today hovers around 11.2 million, and the demand for foreign-born, low-skilled labor has continued on pace with the ebbs and flows of the U.S. economy.<sup>2</sup> The enforcement-only approach has, quite simply, not worked.

<sup>1</sup> Douglas S. Massey, “Backfire at the Border: Why Enforcement Without Legalization Cannot Stop Illegal Immigration,” *Trade Policy Analysis*, No. 29 ([www.cato.org/pubs/tpa/tpa-029.pdf](http://www.cato.org/pubs/tpa/tpa-029.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, “Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010,” Pew Research Center ([www.pewhispanic.org/2011/02/01/unauthorized-immigrant-population-brnational-and-state-trends-2010](http://www.pewhispanic.org/2011/02/01/unauthorized-immigrant-population-brnational-and-state-trends-2010)).

The bishops recognize the legitimate role that the U.S. government has in enforcing its immigration laws, and they do not support an “open borders” policy, as claimed by many of the Church’s critics. Nevertheless, the bishops do support an enforcement of immigration laws that is

1. TARGETED: Enforcement should focus first and foremost on dangerous and criminal activities and avoid any form of ethnic or racial profiling.
2. PROPORTIONAL: Enforcement should not result in unnecessary penalties or rely upon unnecessary force in the application of the law.
3. HUMANE: Enforcement mechanisms should respect the inherent dignity of migrants, protect their human rights, and consider the importance of maintaining family unity whenever possible.

Further, unauthorized immigrants should not be detained for lengthy periods of time without legal representation and should not be intermingled with violent offenders. Alternatives to detention should be pursued for those who do not pose a threat to national security or public safety.

### THE BISHOPS CALL FOR COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

In contrast to an enforcement-only approach, the bishops of the United States support passage of a comprehensive immigration reform package. Such a proposal would have a number of components, including

- An opportunity for those who live in the U.S. as “unauthorized immigrants” to transition to “legal immigrants” if they can demonstrate good moral character and have built up equities in this country
- Efforts to maintain and strengthen the family-based immigration system and family reunification
- The institution of a temporary worker program that is responsive to the needs of the market and that employs strong enforcement mechanisms to ensure that abuses do not occur
- The restoration of due process for individuals caught up in the immigration system

Beyond the immediate goal of securing passage for comprehensive immigration reform, the bishops affirm that the most effective, long-term solution to prevent unauthorized immigration is to address the root causes that prompt migration. The United States must work in solidarity with the international community to help raise the standard of living, uphold human rights, and implement complementary political institutions in the underdeveloped world so that people have the chance to prosper in their homelands, rather than having to migrate to find opportunities elsewhere. This will allow people to remain in their native lands and support their families with dignity. As the bishops have noted time and again, migration should ultimately be driven by choice and not necessity.

“We call on the local church to help newcomers integrate in ways that are respectful, that celebrate their cultures, and that are responsive to their social needs, leading to a mutual enrichment of the local church.” (*Strangers No Longer*, no. 42)

“The Catholic community in the United States continues, with great generosity, to welcome waves of new immigrants, to provide them with pastoral care and charitable assistance, and to support ways of regularizing their situation, especially with regard to the unification of families. A particular sign of this is the long-standing commitment of the American Bishops to immigration reform.”

(Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Bishops of the United States, May 18, 2012)

