

Immigration and the 2012 Elections

The United States is a nation of immigrants – people from all over the world and numerous cultural traditions have made important contributions to our history, and helped shape our vibrant and diverse society. Yet, as the 2012 elections approach, immigration remains one of the most hotly contested issues in the current national debate. Catholic Social Teaching provides a wealth of rich reflection on the theme of migration, built on the Gospel mandate to ‘welcome the stranger.’

Reflections from Catholic Social Teaching

Again, every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own State. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular State does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men.

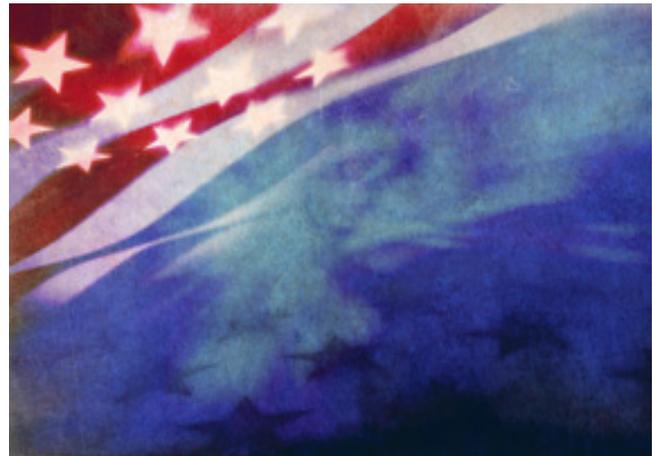
-- *John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, #25*

In its history, America has experienced many immigrations, as waves of men and women came to its various regions in the hope of a better future... ‘[T]he Church in America must be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another. Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration.’

-- *John Paul II, Ecclesia in America, #65*

The Church recognizes the right of a sovereign state to control its borders in furtherance of the common good. It also recognizes the right of human persons to migrate so that they can realize their God-given rights. These teachings complement each other. While the sovereign state may impose reasonable limits on immigration, the common good is not served when the basic human rights of the individual are violated. In the current condition of the world, in which global poverty and persecution are rampant, the presumption is that persons must migrate in order to support and protect themselves and that nations who are able to receive them should do so whenever possible.

-- *USCCB, Strangers No Longer, #39*



Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. ... Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.

-- *USCCB, Strangers No Longer, #38*

[T]he Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into this country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of all—especially those who find themselves in desperate circumstances. We recognize that nations have the right to control their borders. We also recognize and strongly assert that all human persons, created as they are in the image of God, possess a fundamental dignity that gives rise to a more compelling claim to the conditions worthy of human life.

-- *USCCB, Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*

The émigré Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, living in exile in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil.

-- *Pope Pius XII, Exsul Familia*



The Gospel mandate to “welcome the stranger” requires Catholics to care for and stand with immigrants, both documented and undocumented, including immigrant children. Comprehensive reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken immigration system and should include a temporary work program with worker protections and a path to permanent residency; family reunification policies; a broad and fair legalization program; access to legal protections, including due process and essential public programs; refuge for those fleeing persecution and exploitation; and policies to address the root causes of migration.

-- USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, #83

Questions for Candidates to Public Office on Immigration

1. Our immigration system is generally acknowledged to be broken. Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes that when thinking of immigration, we need to recall our common humanity first. What is your vision for immigration reform? How will the reforms that you propose treat migrants with dignity and respect their fundamental human rights?
2. Pope John Paul II has said that our world is “linked together by a common destiny, which is to be constructed together, if catastrophe for all is to be avoided.” Globalization is driving our world ever closer together - policy decisions that the U.S. makes on trade, food and agriculture, financial policy, international relations, and the environment have global repercussions, and in some cases may exacerbate the root causes of migration. What will you do to address the shared responsibility of the U.S. to the root causes of global migration?
3. Catholic Social Teaching holds that people have a right to migrate if necessary to support themselves and their families. How will you change U.S. policies to allow people to move in order to attain the ‘conditions worthy of human life’ ?
4. Approximately 16% of undocumented immigrants are children. The DREAM Act would provide a pathway to citizenship for them, if they met certain criteria. What is your position on the DREAM Act?

Education for Justice Resources

- The Bishops’ Five Principles to Guide Immigration Policy
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/resources/bishops-five-principles-guide-immigration-policy>
- Prayer Service for Migrants
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/resources/prayer-service-migrants>
- Quote Sheet: On Being Citizens and Disciples
<http://www.educationforjustice.org/resources/quote-sheet-being-citizens-and-disciples>

Other Resources

- Justice for Immigrants
www.justiceforimmigrants.org/index.shtml
- Interfaith Immigration Coalition
www.interfaithimmigration.org/
- USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>