

What can we do?

The call to action from the U.S. Catholic bishops in 2000 still rings true: “The 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” (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*).

It can be challenging to figure out how one person might change a persistent, far-reaching issue like immigration for the better. Here are some ideas of what we as Catholics can do, individually and collectively:

► Welcome immigrants as Christ.

Remember that first and foremost immigration is about people. Behind every statistic is a child of God, a person who is a father, mother, son, daughter, brother, or sister. As Pope Francis said: “Migrants are our brothers and sisters in search of a better life,

far away from poverty, hunger, exploitation, and the unjust distribution of the planet’s resources which are meant to be equitably shared by all. Don’t we all want a better, more decent and prosperous life to share with our loved ones?” (Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016). Something as simple as thinking of people who cross borders without proper documentation as “unauthorized” rather than “illegal” opens one’s heart and mind to solutions that preserve human dignity.



► Stay informed about the actual statistics and the stance of the Church.

The website *Justice for Immigrants* (justiceforimmigrants.org) provides information on the position of the U.S. bishops on immigration and how you may contact federal officials to support comprehensive immigration reform. Support from Catholic parishioners can make a real difference in

helping Congress to enact a just and comprehensive reform of our immigration laws and refugee policies.

► Pray for life-giving immigration practices.

Just as we strive to accompany immigrants, the Communion of Saints accompanies us in prayer as we work to proclaim the Gospel:

Virgin Mary, Mother of migrants and refugees, and St. Joseph, who experienced the bitterness of emigration to Egypt, join us in praying for the Holy Spirit to guide us in responding to issues of immigration with the love, justice, and peace of Christ.



Prayer for Migrants and Refugees

Lord Jesus, today you call us to welcome the members of God’s family who come to our land to escape oppression, poverty, persecution, violence, and war. Like your disciples, we too are filled with fear and doubt and even suspicion. We build barriers in our hearts and in our minds.

Lord Jesus, help us by your grace,

To banish fear from our hearts, that we may embrace each of your children as our own brother and sister;

To welcome migrants and refugees with joy and generosity, while responding to their many needs;

To realize that you call all people to your holy mountain to learn the ways of peace and justice;

To share of our abundance as you spread a banquet before us;

To give witness to your love for all people, as we celebrate the many gifts they bring.

Amen.

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WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Immigration



“Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you[?]... As you did to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

— MATTHEW 25:37-38, 40

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The United States is a nation of immigrants. Throughout history, people have left their homelands for a wide variety of reasons — religious, economic, political — to resettle here. Most citizens of the United States have an immigrant relative in the not-too-distant past. Today the Census Bureau reports our foreign-born population at 12.9 percent. In the early twenty-first century, one in four children in the United States has at least one parent who is foreign-born. Immigration has helped shape the United States since its beginning and continues to do so today.



Why is immigration an important issue for the Catholic Church?

The Church takes a position on immigration because — besides being an economic, social, and legal issue — it is a human issue and has moral implications.

Migration is a major theme in the Scriptures: the Holy Family were refugees who fled the terror of Herod; Jesus was an itinerant with no place to lay his head; Jesus taught us to welcome the stranger, for what you do to “the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40).

Migration has also been a major papal theme for more than a century. Pope St. John Paul II called for “the globalization of solidarity” to address the root causes of migration — namely, global religious, economic, and political disparities.

- **Immigration** refers to the act of people moving to a different country with the intent of permanent residence.
- **Refugees** are those people fleeing conflict or persecution who are seeking safety and security in another country.
- **Migrants** are any people who are moving or have moved from one locale to another.

How does the Catechism of the Catholic Church address immigration?

Four teachings from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* provide a basic foundation for a Catholic approach to immigration issues: human dignity, care for the foreigner, the social dimension of the Gospel, and the role of the Church, particularly the laity, in addressing temporal realities that impact the common good.

Upholding Human Dignity

The *Catechism* emphasizes that “respect for the human person considers the other ‘another self.’ It presupposes respect for the fundamental rights that flow from the dignity intrinsic of the person” (1944). Pope Francis pointed out that “from this perspective, it is important to view migrants ... above all as people whose dignity is to be protected and who are capable of contributing to progress and the general welfare” (Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016).

Caring for the Stranger

The *Catechism* addresses within the obligations of Jesus’ Great Commandment (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”) the treatment of foreigners in search of security and a livelihood they cannot find in their own countries (see 2241). Part of being human is to care for others, to be of active service to them, especially when they are at a disadvantage. In the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (“God Is Love”) Pope Benedict XVI reminds us, “Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God” (15).



Proclaiming the Gospel

In paragraph 2419, the *Catechism* cites the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, “Christian revelation ... promotes deeper understanding of the laws of social living.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 23.1). The Church receives from the Gospel the full revelation of the truth about man. When she fulfills her mission of proclaiming the Gospel, she bears witness to man, in the name of Christ, to his dignity and his vocation to the communion of persons.” The social dimension of the Gospel is the human need to live and relate to others in community. “The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature” (CCC, 1879).

Pope St. John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in America*, addresses society in this way: “The Gospel shows us how Christ insisted on the centrality of the human person in the natural order (cf. Lk 12:22-29) and in the social and religious orders, even against the claims of the Law (cf. Mk 2:27): defending men, women (cf. Jn 8:11), and even children (cf. Mt 19:13-15), who in his time and culture occupied an inferior place in society” (57). Oftentimes immigrants occupy an inferior place in our society. The Church calls us to first see immigrants as human beings requiring dignity and respect.



The Common Good

The *Catechism* again draws on teachings from the Second Vatican Council to describe the Catholic understanding of the common good as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more

“Welcoming others means welcoming God in person!”

— POPE FRANCIS



fully and more easily’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26.1) The common good concerns the life of every person and all persons together — even people on the margins of society. It calls for prudence from each, and even more from those who exercise the office of authority” (1906). The *Catechism* goes on to point out, “In the moral order she bears a mission distinct from that of political authorities: the Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end” (2420).

The Church is well within her rights to speak out on public-policy issues of moral consequence and often does. In fact, the Church has a moral obligation to speak out on issues which impact human dignity and human life. In the immigration area, the Church brings special expertise to the table because of our long history in receiving and helping integrate immigrants both into our Church and into American society. A 2016 statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops expresses this plainly, “Serving and welcoming people fleeing violence and conflict in various regions of the world is part of our identity as Catholics” (November 11, 2016, Statement from the USCCB Committee on Migration).