



IMMIGRANTS & REFUGEES

INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the world is experiencing the “the highest levels of displacement on record.” An estimated 34,000 people are displaced every day. As of the end of 2015, 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced from their homes and of these 21.3 million were registered as refugees. As Catholics and Americans, we are called to accompany immigrants and refugees and to protect their lives, rights, and dignity.

CATHOLIC TEACHING

Jesus taught us how to respond to the strangers in our midst: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.” (Mt 25:35-36)

Church teaching has consistently upheld the right response to migration. St. John Paul II wrote that “[E]very 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 (*Pacem in Terris*, 25).

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI taught that, “Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.” (*Caritas in veritate*, 62)

Pope Francis reminds us of the terrible exploitation that refugees experience and admonishes that “No one can claim to be indifferent in the face of new forms of slavery imposed by criminal organizations which buy and sell men, women and children as forced laborers in construction, agriculture, fishing or in other markets. How many minors are still forced to fight in militias as child soldiers! How many people are victims of organ trafficking, forced begging and sexual exploitation! Today’s refugees are fleeing from these aberrant crimes, and they appeal to the Church and the human community to ensure that, in the outstretched hand of those who receive them, they can see the face of the Lord, ‘the Father of mercies and God of all consolation’ (2 Cor 1:3).” (*Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, January 17, 2016)

Alongside this fundamental respect for the human rights of refugees and immigrants, the Church also recognizes the legitimate right of a state to control its borders for the common good. As the Church consistently teaches, these rights need not be opposed to one another, but rather they can and must complement one another. Internationally and in the United States, the Catholic Church repeatedly offers solutions to the problems engendered by migration.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

In *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, a joint pastoral statement issued by the bishops of Mexico and the United States (2003), the bishops offer the following blueprint for comprehensive immigration reform: 1) address the root causes of migration; 2) establish easier avenues for legal immigration (e.g., family-

based, work-based); 3) legalize existing unauthorized immigrants; 4) follow humane enforcement policies; and 5) protect the human and legal rights of all migrants.

In addition to advocating for comprehensive reform, the U.S. bishops are currently supporting a bi-partisan bill in Congress, known as the “Bridge Act,” which would protect the hundreds of thousands of “dreamers,” young immigrants who were brought to this country as children. The bill would provide temporary relief from deportation and ensure future employment authorization to young people who are eligible for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

Refugee Resettlement

The Catholic Church is the largest private refugee resettlement agency in our nation, helping to resettle about one third of the refugees who enter the U.S. annually, or more than one million refugees since 1975. Here in Wisconsin, the state authorizes Catholic Charities in Green Bay and Milwaukee to resettle refugees. Catholic Charities staffers work with hundreds of Catholic parishioners to provide shelter, food, clothing, employment services, and English instruction. Of the 70,000 refugees who presently reside in Wisconsin, 95 percent (66,500) are self-sufficient and most are U.S. citizens.

The bishops of Wisconsin remind us that as “Americans [we] have been immensely blessed. We must be generous in sharing these blessings with others.” (*Statement of Wisconsin Bishops on Terrorist Attacks and Resettlement of Syrian Refugees*, November 3, 2015)

ACTION REQUESTED

Write or call your **STATE** lawmakers and urge the following:

1. Support legislation that encourages cooperation and respect between immigrants and local law enforcement.
2. Help immigrants understand their rights.
3. Oppose Assembly Bill 127, which would unnecessarily limit the ability of local governments to discern how to engage immigrants.

Write or call your **FEDERAL** lawmakers and urge the following:

1. Pass bills that nullify the migration-related Executive Orders. Ensure that refugees fleeing persecution are treated humanely, settled safely, and reunited with their families.
2. Support the Bridge Act (S. 128/H.R. 496) to help hundreds of thousands of young immigrants. To send an email, go to <http://justiceforimmigrants.org/action-alerts/let-support-known-bridge-act>.
3. Pass comprehensive immigration reform.

The USCCB has extensive resources on its website, www.justiceforimmigrants.org. See also the resources on the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) website, <https://cliniclegal.org>.

For more information, please contact Barbara Sella at 608/257-0004.

To contact your State Senator or Representative, visit the Wisconsin State Legislature website at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov> and click on “Find My Legislators,” or call the State Legislative Hotline, 1-800-362-9472.