



IMMIGRATION

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems facing Wisconsin's economy is the low growth rate of the population. In part this is the result of an aging population and a lower birth rate relative to other states. In part it is the result of low migration to our state. Only 4.2% of Wisconsin residents are foreign born, compared with the national average of 11.9%. In this new global economy, how we respond to immigrants will not only be a test of our compassion and respect for human dignity, but it may very well determine our state's economic future.

IMMIGRATION FROM A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

As the U.S. Catholic Bishops stated in their 2000 statement, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*,

Without condoning undocumented migration, 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. 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. Accordingly, the Church also advocates legalization opportunities for the maximum number of undocumented persons, particularly those who have built equities and otherwise contributed to their communities.

Catholic social teaching holds that, like the right to property, the right to migrate is not unlimited. It may be restricted when other, higher rights are endangered. If the security of a nation is threatened or if the nation does not have sufficient resources to sustain its own inhabitants, it is lawful to halt the flow of immigrants. Such, however, is not the case in the United States, where the vast majority of immigrants are not a threat to our security, but rather are hardworking individuals who improve their lives and those of their new homeland while performing the work that native-born citizens are either unwilling or unable to perform.

WCC POSITIONS

Several specific proposals would have a direct impact on the lives of immigrants in our state:

Resident Tuition for Undocumented Immigrants. The WCC supports a proposal in the state budget that would allow undocumented Wisconsin students to pay resident tuition at any UW school or technical college to which they are admitted, providing they meet certain criteria: 1) students must have graduated from a Wisconsin high school; 2) they must have lived in Wisconsin for three years prior to high school graduation; 3) and they must provide an affidavit stating that they will file an application for permanent residency as soon as they are able to do so.

Some argue that granting in-state tuition to undocumented students simply rewards illegal behavior. Justice, however, holds that because the children of undocumented immigrants are in this country through

no fault of their own, they should not be punished for any illegal actions their parents took. This is one of the reasons why we do not deny these children access to a K-12 education in our public schools. By extension, if undocumented students complete high school and take the steps necessary to gain admission to a UW school, it is only right that they should be charged the same tuition as their peers who are citizens or legal residents. Furthermore, resident tuition exists for those who pay state taxes (e.g. sales, real estate, and income taxes) something that all immigrants do—whether they are documented or undocumented.

The WCC also supports this proposal for the pragmatic reason that a more educated and diverse population benefits everyone. Poorly educated immigrants have already added to the economic prosperity of our state, not only because they willingly perform many necessary jobs in the agricultural and service sectors, but also because they create demand for a whole range of goods and services—many of which translate into more jobs for our state. All the more so, will immigrants educated in our state universities enrich our community with their culture, expertise, and entrepreneurship. Not to mention the assistance they will be able to give to their fellow immigrants in navigating and adapting to American ways. At a time when attracting a diverse and educated population is critical to the economic future of our state, our universities should be given every opportunity to enroll our best and brightest immigrant students.

Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants. In 2005, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed into law a bill (2005 Wisconsin Act 126) that prohibits the Department of Transportation (DOT) from issuing a driver's license or identification card to a person who does not present proof of legal presence in the United States. The WCC opposed this legislation on several grounds. Unlicensed drivers are more likely to cause accidents because they will not undergo drivers' tests. They will also be more difficult to find in case of accidents. An additional concern was, and is, the increased chance of racial profiling, as government clerks and others attempt to determine which foreign-born persons are or are not here legally. Drivers' licenses exist for the purpose of ensuring safe driving; they should not be used to enforce the federal government's responsibility for immigration.

Even with the passage of Act 126, certain modifications can and should be made. Specifically, one of the major purposes of the federal "Real ID" Act was to ensure that only citizens or legal residents have drivers' licenses for identification in federal jurisdictions, such as when boarding airplanes. Under the "Real ID" Act, states still are permitted to issue driving *certificates*, which could not be used for federal identification, but which could be used to get car insurance, etc. The WCC supports the creation of driving certificates for any state resident who does not have a Social Security number.

ACTION REQUESTED

Write or call your legislator and make the following points:

1. Support resident tuition for undocumented residents.
2. Support efforts to create driving certificates for state residents without Social Security numbers.

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