

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**For Immediate Release
December 12, 2011**

BISHOPS ASK CATHOLICS TO WELCOME IMMIGRANTS, BACK COMPREHENSIVE REFORM

Wisconsin's Roman Catholic Bishops are asking Catholics and others to reach out to immigrants and to back comprehensive immigration reform that does not unfairly discriminate against them in a pastoral letter to Wisconsin's largest religious denomination.

The bishops released the letter, "Traveling Together in Hope," on December 12, the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of the Americas.

In making this pastoral public, John Huebscher, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), explained that the state's bishops also wish to educate Catholics about the cost to human dignity of continuing our present policies.

The pastoral letter notes that the Catholic Church has long experience in helping immigrants of all nationalities build new lives and becoming faithful citizens in their adopted country.

"Our universal Church has observed and participated in migrations all across the globe. We have helped millions of immigrants – Catholic and non-Catholic – to prosper in new lands. We have done so and will continue to do so because we see the image and likeness of God in every human being. From the Prophets to recent papal teaching, the Church has a consistent message: welcome the stranger (Mt 25:35)."

The bishops recognize that Catholics, like other Americans, are not united on how to respond to immigrants who arrive here illegally. In doing so, they identify themes in Catholic teaching that can help people balance legal requirements and moral obligations.

"Our *Catechism* addresses directly the duty of wealthy nations like ours to welcome foreigners who are searching for a better life and to respect their natural right to emigrate. At the same time, it recognizes the right of governments to regulate immigration for the sake of the common good (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., n. 2241). This duty and this right are not incompatible; it is possible to respect both."

The bishops acknowledge that "many are deeply troubled that millions of immigrants reside in the U.S. without legal authorization."

"We too share this concern; obeying laws is essential to any stable society. As Americans, however, we have to acknowledge that some of our foreign and domestic policies and practices contribute to the illegal entry of immigrants."

The bishops describe the economic forces that encourage immigration in the first place.

“Our nation is a magnet for immigrants because there is work here and because of the international disparity in wages. Our aging population needs younger workers. Entire economic sectors – service, construction, agriculture – would falter without immigrant labor. Here in Wisconsin, our dairy industry relies heavily on immigrants.”

The bishops also observe that despite their illegal entry, America’s undocumented immigrants, like millions before them, play a vital role in our nation.

“In spite of all the challenges they faced, however, these and other immigrants helped build our nation. Again and again, America has demonstrated that its highest ideals – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – can be embraced and reinvigorated by people from all around the world who come to our country searching for a better way of life.”

The letter links the immigration issue to the sanctity of all human life affirming that all human beings have moral claims on basic goods.

“As Catholics, we uphold the sanctity and dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death. We affirm that every human being is created in God’s image through His boundless love. Just as we work to protect the innocent unborn, 40 million of whom have already lost their lives, so we cannot turn our backs on the 12 million immigrants in our midst who long to live freely and fully.”

The bishops conclude by calling on all Catholics to help immigrants and to advocate for comprehensive immigration reform, one that is not “a blanket amnesty, but rather a path to citizenship that includes restitution where it is owed.”

“Let us then commit ourselves to helping resolve this pressing immigration crisis. We do so not just for our nation’s sake, but also for the sake of millions of children and adults who live fearfully in the shadows, who are vulnerable to exploitation, whose family members are being cruelly isolated, detained, and deported.”

“Our Catholic faith,” they write, “can and must transcend political and cultural turmoil. Let us remember that in the end we are all migrants on this earth, traveling together in hope towards our loving God. May Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of the Americas, protect us on our journey.”

In addition to the letter, the WCC has published an accompanying Question and Answer resource. A Spanish language version of both documents is available on the WCC website at www.wisconsinatholic.org.

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