



Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration

The Catholic Church in the United States is an immigrant Church with a long history of embracing diverse newcomers and

providing assistance and pastoral care to immigrants, migrants, refugees, and people on the move. Our Church has responded to Christ's call for us to "welcome the stranger among us," for in this encounter with the immigrant, the migrant, and the refugee in our midst, we encounter Christ.

A rich body of Church teaching, including Papal encyclicals, Bishops' statements and pastoral letters, has consistently reinforced our moral obligation to treat the stranger as we would treat Christ himself. In the 2001 pastoral statement, Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, the Bishops of the United States called upon the Catholic faithful to a conversion of minds and hearts, imploring us to communion and solidarity with diverse newcomers, and entreating us to find new and meaningful ways to welcome our immigrant sisters and brothers into our parishes, schools and communities. In 2003, the Bishops of the United States, together with the Bishops of Mexico, in the pastoral statement, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope" / "Juntos en el Camino de la Esperanza Ya no Somos Extranjeros" acknowledged that the current immigration system is badly in need of reform and offered a comprehensive set of recommendations for changing U.S. laws and policies to bring about a more humane and just immigration system in the United States.

Immigration in the United States is a complex issue. When evaluating immigration policy issues, it is necessary to address the human dignity of immigrants and refugees who are seeking refuge and a better life, and respect and recognize due process and human rights. It is also important to acknowledge states' rights and responsibilities to control their borders. Immigrants and refugees have various reasons for why they want to come to the United States: many flee persecution and exploitation, some hope to reunite with family members already living in the U.S. or to find work that will provide support and a just way of life for their families back home. Our current broken immigration system has led to undocumented people living in this country, working jobs and raising their families in fear of deportation. Go to the USCCB website to learn more about the Church's migration principles and values.

Five principles that help guide the Church's approach to migration

I. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.

All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.

II. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.

The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.

III. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.

The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their territories but rejects such control when it is exerted merely for the purpose of acquiring additional wealth. More powerful economic nations, which have the ability to protect and feed their residents, have a strong obligation to accommodate migration flows.

IV. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.

Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.

V. The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment by enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.