



## On Immigration

*Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity which should be respected. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.*

Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope  
A joint statement from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States

**T**he Catholic Church has a longstanding interest in immigration and how public policy affects the human dignity of those seeking new lives in the United States. While the national sentiment pertaining to immigration has been vociferous, it is the Church's belief that existing policy has led to the undermining of human dignity, to the death of thousands of people, to the separation of families, and to the influx of unauthorized people in this country.

Until authentic human development is achieved in what is now the developing world, individuals will migrate in order to improve their condition. Those who come to the United States and to Michigan in an undocumented status come largely to seek a better life for themselves and their families, or simply to survive. While the Catholic Church does not advocate undocumented immigration into the United States, it affirms the human dignity of the undocumented who live within our midst and makes every effort to ensure that basic human needs are met and that human rights are not trampled upon.

Millions of people living in poverty, despair and economic oppression flee to the United States in the hope of a new life, for dignified living conditions, and for a brighter future. Until such time as the global community effectively

addresses the root causes of undocumented migration, individual nations and states must confront the presence of the undocumented in a manner which upholds the dignity and basic human rights of all immigrants, regardless of their legal status. The Catholic Church has committed itself to continue the work of advocacy for laws that respect the human rights of immigrants and preserve the unity of the immigrant family.

In June 2004, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration and the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) Board of Directors resolved to make comprehensive immigration reform a major public policy priority within the Church. Those efforts resulted, in part, in the creation of the Justice for Immigrants campaign, which seeks to maximize advocacy among the lay faithful in support of comprehensive immigration reform. The campaign website, [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org), offers tools and information for grassroots organizing, education and advocacy efforts. At the state level, Michigan's bishops in April 2007 spoke in support of comprehensive reform, especially as it relates to the reunification of families. The statement is republished in this edition of FOCUS, which in its entirety addresses human dignity and just treatment of the immigrant population.

# Immigration Policy in Michigan

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Undocumented immigrants have become increasingly integral to both the U.S. and Michigan economies. According to Michigan Farm Bureau, failure to include guest worker provisions in immigration reform could cost the Michigan agricultural industry \$270 million in production losses and \$150 million in net farm income losses annually. Immigrants comprise a large percentage of the agricultural workforce in the state and are involved in other industries, paying millions of dollars in taxes, be it the income tax or sales tax. The Immigration Policy Center reports that undocumented immigrants contribute roughly 7 billion dollars per year to the Social Security Trust Fund. The jobs performed and the taxes paid are particularly critical at this time in Michigan history as problems with the state economy continue. Yet the important role immigrants play in helping to turn Michigan's economic wheel goes underappreciated or unwelcome—including to the point of hostility, where immigration officials raid homes and break apart families across the state.

While thousands of undocumented persons are present in the state, there exists a simmering anti-immigrant mentality at the State Capitol that focuses more on aggressive and unrealistic enforcement than on enacting measures that promote a dignified existence. Legislation introduced to gin up public fear of immigrants while seeking gain in an election year in no way advances human dignity. Nor does it benefit the state's agricultural economy for undocumented workers to flee the state due to a lack of legal transportation (Michigan is the 4th largest employer of migrant farmworkers in the nation). The presence of migrants throughout Michigan's communities should compel the civil authorities to recognize each individual's existence and right to a dignified life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in paragraph 2241, speaks to this point:

*The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him.*

Earlier this year the legislature moved to specify who is and who is not eligible to acquire a driver's license in Michigan. Following a state Attorney General opinion that only legal residents of the state may obtain a license, the legislature acted in a bipartisan fashion to allow those

who are legally present, such as refugees, seminarians and priests from foreign nations, among others, to acquire a license. Due to these measures, undocumented residents not in the process of obtaining legal status are prohibited from acquiring a driver's license in Michigan.

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According to *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, a joint pastoral statement composed by the bishops of Mexico and the United States:

*The Church recognizes the right of a sovereign state to control its borders in furtherance of the common good. It also recognizes the right of human persons to migrate so that they can realize their God-given rights. These teachings complement each other. While the sovereign state may impose reasonable limits on immigration, the common good is not served when the basic human rights of the individual are violated. In the current condition of the world, in which global poverty and persecution are rampant, the presumption is that persons must migrate in order to support and protect themselves and that nations who are able to receive them should do so whenever possible.*

There have been dozens of bills introduced in the 2007–08 legislative session that address the issue of immigration—many of which place in peril those who are living and working in the state in an undocumented status. These bills address matters such as driver's licenses, state identification cards, health care, education, law enforcement, employment practices and many other aspects of daily life. Catholic social teaching has a long, rich tradition in defending the individual's right to migrate. This teaching is the basis for Michigan Catholic Conference advocacy with the state Legislature as it pertains to measures such as those referenced.

# *Statement of Roman Catholic Bishops of Michigan on Federal Immigration Legislation*

April 29, 2007

We, the Roman Catholic Bishops of the state of Michigan, wish to add our voices to the ongoing public debate regarding the rights and responsibilities of immigrants, particularly those of Hispanic descent. As shepherds who understand the needs of our people, we speak in communion with all the Bishops of our nation. We also build on the long-standing social justice tradition of our Church, a tradition which teaches the dignity of every person and our responsibility to work against any injustices which would compromise the dignity of immigrants, especially workers and their families.

For the sake of justice toward immigrant laborers, we propose that the laws of our nation should conform to the following principles:

- 1 Immigration legislation should permit the prompt reunification of families. Our current immigration system imposes an unbearable burden upon the families of many immigrants. Spouses and minor children of permanent residents working in the United States often wait eight years in order to receive a visa necessary for the reunification of the family. The law itself places workers in the position of having to make an impossible choice: they must choose between immigrating to the United States without documentation and, therefore, without the protection of their rights or working within the legal system but at the expense of an indefinite separation from their families.
- 2 Immigration legislation should open a path toward the legalization of undocumented workers currently living and working in the United States. The economy of the United States enjoys the benefits of immigrant workers but without providing recognition of their dignity as workers. Legalization should not impose intolerable burdens on workers—such as severe monetary sanctions and family separations.
- 3 Immigration legislation should create an efficient system for the future entrance of temporary workers as well as permanent legal residents. Justice requires that immigrant workers have the same benefits, salaries, and labor protections enjoyed by other American workers. Immigration reform should facilitate the unity of families and allow workers the possibility of secure movement from the United States to the land of their birth. While the Church recognizes the importance of secure borders, such concerns can be addressed without jeopardizing good and respectful working relationships among employers and employees, whether they are from the United States or from another country.

We invite everyone—Catholics and non-Catholics alike—to take an active part in the promotion of a just and realistic reform of the immigration system in the United States. We ought to make known to our representatives in Congress the urgency of this problem with hopes that they will, this year, arrive at a real solution.

On May 1, we celebrate the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker. We look to Saint Joseph as the husband of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, the guardian of the child Jesus and a humble laborer, a carpenter. As St. Matthew's Gospel reminds us, the Holy Family knew firsthand the experience of migrant peoples; they also modeled the dignity of human labor and the sanctity of family living. As we celebrate this feast and many gather around the world to affirm the dignity and rights of workers, in a special way, we join our voices with those of the Hispanic immigrant workers. We thank God for their presence and gifts, and pledge to work together with all people of goodwill for the recognition of their civic rights.

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# *Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.*

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**T**he Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), a subsidiary of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops founded in 1985, constitutes one expression of the Church's ministry to newcomers to the United States. CLINIC provides training and comprehensive support services to 161 diocesan immigration programs, with 262 field offices in 48 states. CLINIC also directly serves immigrant detainees, helps to immigrate foreign-born religious workers, and manages national citizenship, labor, community empowerment, and anti-domestic violence projects.

In addition, CLINIC identifies problems with U.S. immigration policy and addresses them through advocacy. According to its mission statement, CLINIC exists "to enhance and expand delivery of legal services to indigent and low-income immigrants principally through diocesan immigration programs and to meet the needs identified by the Catholic Church in the United States." More information about CLINIC can be found by visiting [www.cliniclegal.org](http://www.cliniclegal.org)

Listed below is contact information for diocesan offices in Michigan that are able to provide assistance with legal immigration matters:

Detroit	Community Immigration Legal Services	(313) 843-1878
Gaylord	Secretariat for Peace and Justice	(989) 732-5147
Grand Rapids	Immigration Advocacy and Assistance	(616) 356-6292
Kalamazoo	Immigration Assistance Program	(269) 385-1019
Lansing	Immigration Legal Services	(517) 323-4734
Marquette	Catholic Charities U.P.	(906) 227-9116
Saginaw	Office of Christian Service	(989) 797-6650

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## FOCUS

Volume 36, Number 2  
May 2008

FOCUS is published by the Michigan Catholic Conference  
510 South Capitol Avenue, Lansing Michigan 48933  
[www.micatholicconference.org](http://www.micatholicconference.org)

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