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Catholic Conference of KY Calls for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

(Frankfort – September 6, 2006) Today, with very few legislative days left in this Congress, the Catholic Conference of KY has urged each member of KY's congressional delegation to support comprehensive immigration reform *now*. This request follows the release by the four Catholic Bishops of KY of a major pastoral Statement on immigration, *Every Man and Woman is the Image of God*, a title that echoes the call by Pope Benedict XVI.

In December 2005 the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4437, the Border Security, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Prevention Act of 2005. All 6 Ky members of the House voted for this measure that only included border enforcement measures.

On May 25, 2006, the U.S. Senate passed the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (CIRA, S. 2611) of 2006, 62-36. Senator McConnell voted for this measure. Senator Bunning voted against it. Although it is not perfect, the legislation incorporates many of the elements endorsed by the bishops, including a path to citizenship for the undocumented, a temporary worker program for future flows of workers, and reductions in family reunification waiting times.

The next step in the legislative process involves reconciling the House and Senate versions of immigration reform in a conference committee which has yet to be created despite the waning legislative days and the compelling need for comprehensive reform.

The Bishops support enforcement of our immigration laws, as long as these laws respect the basic human rights of migrants. Current immigration laws and H.R. 4437, in their judgment, fail in this regard. Therefore, as a matter of justice, any bill which comes out of a House-Senate Conference Committee must include:

- 1) a viable path to citizenship for the 11-12 million undocumented in the country;
- 2) a temporary worker program which protects the rights of workers and includes a path to citizenship for those who choose it;
- 3) family-based immigration reform to reduce waiting times for family reunification;
- 4) restoration of due process protections, and
- 5) policies which address the root causes of economic flight.

In their pastoral statement, the KY Bishops acknowledge the controversial nature of the public policy debate about immigration. Nonetheless, they invite Catholics and other Kentuckians to

assess this crisis in light of Scripture and the moral demands of the Gospel, and not rely only on the narrow framework of civil law. The KY Bishops emphasized Pope John Paul II's teaching, "For Christians, the migrant is not merely an individual to be respected in accordance with the norms established by law, but a person whose presence challenges them and whose needs become an obligation for their responsibility. 'What have you done to your brother?' (cf. Gn 4:9). The answer should not be limited to what is imposed by law, but should be made in the manner of solidarity."

Every Man and Woman is the Image of God is found at:
www.ccky.org/justice_for_immigrants.htm.

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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.