



This is the first in a series of articles by the CCK Hispanic Committee on the **Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform** which aims to reach beyond the networks of the participating national agencies, and to enlist the support of Catholic individuals and institutions in dioceses throughout the country.

Visit www.justiceforimmigrants.org for more information. Le invitamos a visitar nuestra página con regularidad, debido a que se estará actualizando constantemente con materiales, noticias relevantes y otra información que esperamos sea de su utilidad.

Migration in Light of the Word of God: Why is the Catholic Church involved in Immigration?

By Tom Gurucharri



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Immigration! Illegal immigrants! Undocumented! Border Security...! Lately you can hardly turn on the television or radio or read a newspaper without these words being thrown at you. With the media, you at least have the choice of turning them off or putting the paper down. But when the issue comes to you from the pulpit during "your" Sunday Mass, you no longer have such a simple

choice. You might escape, thinking that this is just the pastor's personal issue and let it go – but no, this keeps coming back at you again and again.

So what is the real issue here? Why is the Catholic Church involved in immigration and why does it concern me? What you are hearing from the pulpit and from others in your Catholic community is not just personal opinions. It is solid advocacy from the Church on the dignity and value of all human life. The position of the Catholic Church is derived from Christ's own words and the Gospels; perhaps the most familiar to most of us is the Gospel of Matthew 25:35-40:

...I was a stranger and you made me welcome; ...whenever you did this for one of the least of my followers, you did it for me.

Christ's message in these Gospel words is clear and powerful! We are not being asked to acknowledge and accept strangers because it is the socially correct thing to do – we are asked to do this because they are His people – and He loves them! As a refugee Himself, Jesus knows all too well the pain of being rejected and unwelcome.

In 2000, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops promulgated an important Pastoral statement: *Welcoming the Stranger among us: Unity in Diversity*. Therein the Bishop's repeat the words of Matthew's gospel to challenge us to a conversion. We are challenged to go beyond mere responsibility and become compassionate to the real plight of the immigrant, that we reach out in a genuine way to welcome those with whom we are not familiar or comfortable!

The Church's teaching of respect for human dignity also comes from the words of our Popes in their encyclicals and statements from our Bishops. In his 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII clearly states the position of the Church on the right to immigrate:

...every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own State. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular State does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men. (25)

So why now? Why is this such a concern today? The real answer is that it is not just today. But some of the labels are different and the difficulty of understanding a poverty and desperation, that "we did not create" make this a little more difficult to accept. It is reasonable and fair to recognize this. It is just as reasonable and fair for the Church to challenge us to learn, to welcome, to accept, to embrace what we may not fully understand.

The Catholic Church supports the rights of a sovereign nation to control its border. But the laws enacted to do so should not just be to protect our economic well-being. They should consider the responsibility and ac-

countability of a nation for its principles and its sovereign obligations. The United States is known as one of the most charitable nations in the world. We are known for our diversity and our ability to accept an immense challenge when the need arises. As Catholics, we who profess that we believe in the One, Holy, and Apostolic Church should be at the front of the line reaching out to those who come to us so broken and needy that they felt they had to leave their own nations.

In 1965, when this country was just beginning to awaken to the injustices of racism, the Second Vatican Council was closing its final session. At that time the world's Catholic bishops their important *Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World*, a document on Catholic social thought clearly stating the role of the church in the world. They wrote that "the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel; (the Church must be) at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4, 76)

At the time that document was issued, Cardinal Mahoney of Los Angeles summarized the Bishops' statement this way: "Catholic teaching is clear: Our personal destiny is linked to the fate of those most vulnerable."

Today, over forty years later, as Cardinal Archbishop of Los Angeles, a region of the country severely impacted by immigration today, Cardinal Mahoney is still a

leading advocate against harmful legislation. He continues promoting compassion and positive change in treatment of the immigrant.

The need for the Catholic Church to teach and encourage us to act on today's immigration issues is unfortunate. But the fact that the basis for these teachings is Christ's own loving message of the Gospels is a blessing. It is wonderfully appropriate that the USCCB's Justice for Immigrants Campaign is called "a journey of hope."

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Action: Join Catholic Conference of KY's legislative advocacy network to influence immigration public policy, www.ccky.org.

Bishops call on the local church to help newcomers integrate in ways that are respectful, that celebrate their cultures, and that are responsive to their social needs, leading to a mutual enrichment of the local church.



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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops, 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 388,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.