



This is the fourth 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 Catholic Social Teaching

By Rev. Ken Mikulcik



Rev. Ken Mikulcik

As one listens to public discourse in news commentary and reads editorial statements in the papers and listens to conversations one cannot help but pick up on the vast spectrum of opinions on immigration. Most of those opinions have been formed over the past few months as the invisible workforce of undocumented workers revealed its face in public rallies in major U. S. cities on April 10th and May 1st. The bishops of the United States and Mexico, however, have been reflecting on this pastoral concern for many years.

Following upon the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, and the U.S. bishops' own *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us*, their more recent document, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* offers a mature understanding of the dignity of the person and the phenomenon of modern migration. Written jointly with the Mexican bishops it shows the Universal Church's capacity to address the human condition in a comprehensive and clear way, laying out the principals of Catholic social teaching as it applies to migration, the pastoral response needed, and the public policy challenge and responses.

After pointing out the common history of migration and a shared faith in Jesus Christ in the two countries of Mexico and the United States, the document offers a reflection on migration in the light of the Word of God and Catholic social teaching. Migration was present as a factor in the history of Israel beginning with Abraham and Sarah welcoming the three strangers who were a manifestation of the Lord. The whole episode of Israel's migration to and from Egypt is a key event in the Old Testament. That migration was echoed in the Holy Family's trip to Egypt as refugees. Jesus' identification with the needy in the judgment scene in Mathew 25 can easily be

connected with the experience of the migrant being so often hungry, thirsty and detained. Finally, the risen Jesus commands his apostles to go to all nations, sealing his mandate with the gift of the Holy Spirit. That same Holy Spirit's guidance has been manifested in "Catholic social teaching, in particular the teachings on human dignity and the principal of solidarity." (SNL n. 27).

What has seemed remarkably absent in the public discourse on migration, namely the dignity and rights of the one who is migrating, is the starting point for the bishops. Beginning with Pius XII's *Exsul Familia*, the bishops point out that persons have a right to migrate to achieve conditions worthy of human life. They also point out that John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* includes not only a right to migrate, but also a right not to migrate. This is all in the context of the sovereign state's right to control its borders keeping in mind that that right is not absolute. John Paul II referred to the refugee crisis as a "festering wound." And he reiterates in *Ecclesia in America* the rights of migrants even in the case of "non-legal immigration."

The two Bishops' conferences echo this rich tradition as they lay out for us five principals that emerge with regard to immigration. The first is that "Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland." Work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need. Second, "Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families." The goods of the earth belong to all, so persons have a right to migrate in order to survive. Third, "Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders." This control does not include closing a border to accumulate more wealth. Therefore wealthy nations have a stronger obligation to accommodate migrants. Fourth, "Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection." At minimum, this means that asylum seekers should not be incarcerated and that they deserve a full hearing by the competent authority. Fifth, "The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected." (SNL nn. 34 - 38) Regardless of one's legal status, migrants possess inherent



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. It is through this lens that we assess the current migration reality between the United States and Mexico.” (SNL n. 39)

The prophetic character of the bishops’ statement, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* shines through as a timely document providing clarity at a time when many in the United States are caught up in the fear that accompanies loss of jobs and a costly war effort. The bishops faithfully frame the whole discussion as it should be framed: with a foundation in the inherent value of human dignity.

June 2006

Rev. Ken Milkulcik is a priest working in the Owensboro Diocese as Pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Mayfield, KY

human dignity that should be respected.

Finally, the bishops of the two conferences offer their assessment of the current situation between the United States and Mexico:

“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

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.



1042 Burlington Lane
Frankfort Kentucky 40601
502.875-4345
cckstaff@ccky.org

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.