



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.

Immigrant Youth: Resource for Church and State

By Patti Murphy



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As the Congressional debate on immigration reform unfolded, the secular media has characterized immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, in a negative light. In this article I intend to shed light on aspects of immigrant life that may not be familiar to the average reader. The focus is immigrant children and youth.

Let me share with you an inspiring process that Catholic Hispanic youth and young adults have been involved in now for over a year. Last summer young Hispanic leaders in parishes all across the country led a series of five reflections and gathered information and suggestions about a common vision for Hispanic youth ministry from other young Hispanics in their parishes. These parish results have filtered through diocesan and regional gatherings where young adult delegates have prioritized them. In addition, delegates did the necessary fundraising to allow them to attend the First National Encounter for Hispanic Youth and Young Adult Ministry at Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, June 8-11, where participants will prioritize the final results.

As I attended the Southeast Regional Encounter in March with delegates from our Diocese, the enthusiasm, dedication and prophetic voice of the Hispanic young people inspired me. One result of their work seems particularly pertinent. It was ranked second by the regional participants as the most prophetic, global, urgent, feasible element with multiple benefits for Hispanic youth ministry: recognize the gifts of the young people and create opportuni-

ties to put them to use serving the community.

The element ranked first was to promote the personal encounter with Jesus.

The fact that the reflection of thousands of young Hispanics has led to such a conclusion shows their mature view of the Church and issues a challenge to the Church and the nation. As a Church do we see immigrant youth as a group of people with gifts ready to serve the community? Or do we see them as a burden to a Church stretched for resources? As a nation do we see immigrant children and youth as having great potential when properly nurtured and educated? Or do we simply view them as troublemakers overcrowding our schools and increasing our tax burden?

The Bishops of the United States have recognized the gift of immigrants and the implication it has for youth ministry as expressed in this quote from *Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry* (USCCB, 1997): "Adolescents today are growing up in a culturally diverse society. The perceived image of the United States has shifted from a melting pot to a multihued tapestry. The strength and beauty of the tapestry lie in the diverse colors and textures of its component threads—the values and traditions claimed by the different racial and ethnic groups that constitute the people of the United States. Ministry with adolescents recognizes, values, and responds to the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and experiences that exist among adolescents and develops culturally responsive and inclusive programming to address these needs." (pg. 23) Also see <http://www.usccb.org/laity/youth/rtvcontents.shtml>.

Our challenge is to stop seeing immigrant children and youth as burdens, and start recognizing the beauty that their values and traditions, passed



down from their parents, add to our Church and our country. One way we can honor their importance is to help families learn to balance the acculturation process of living in the United States with the passing down of their culture. Instead of insisting that immigrant children “melt” or assimilate into our cul-

ture in order to be accepted, we can teach them to be proud of their cultural inheritance and teach all of our children to appreciate people with backgrounds different from their own.

Also, just as the Hispanic youth prioritized the recognition of their gifts at the Encounter, we should “empower all young people for leadership and ministry with their peers—in schools, parishes, and civic communities—by affirming their gifts, equipping them with skills for leadership and ministry, and by placing them in leadership roles or giving them leadership opportunities where they can make a contribution.” (*Renewing the Vision*, pg. 43)

If we give immigrant children and youth the chance to embrace their own culture, recognize their gifts and put them to service for others, they will not only improve our Church, but our country as well. They will find belonging in the Church, have a personal encounter with Jesus and be more open to following their vocations later in life. Which means more faithful priests, more dedicated religious sisters, more devoted parents, more honest businessmen, more committed congresswomen, and the list goes on and on.

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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.