



This is the seventh 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](http://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.*

# The Root Causes of Immigration

By Rev. Thomas Smith, O.F.M. Conv.



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There have been large groups of people immigrating throughout history. This land of ours was probably settled first by people who crossed the current Bering Strait from Asia. After the "discovery" by the Europeans, many came from Europe to find freedom of religion, a new start, or riches in a land yet to be explored. Other groups came looking for employment, escape from violence or repression, or for education. There is no single cause for the movements of people from one area to another. The U.S. Bishops note this fact:

"We must never forget that many immigrants come to this country in desperate circumstances. Some have fled political persecution, war, and economic devastation...Others have wagered on finding a better life in this country in the face of economic desperation at home. As Pope John Paul II has noted, 'In many regions of the world today people live in tragic situations of instability and uncertainty. It does not come as a surprise that in such contexts the poor and the destitute make plans to escape, to seek a new land that can offer them bread, dignity and peace. . .'" U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, Nov. 15, 2000

In many ways it is the economic and political policies of the United States that cause an even greater push for immigration to the U.S. The poorest countries of the world account for only 0.4 percent of international trade, yet they lose an estimated \$700 billion a year due to unfair trade rules. The U.S. and other developed countries are currently pursuing "free trade" agreements with many developing countries. Developing countries, which often utilize higher levels of tariffs and taxes on incoming goods in order to gather revenue for

their governments, are often forced to eliminate these tariffs and taxes as part of free trade agreements. Yet, many people concerned with poverty are pointing to statistics that show that unregulated, "free" trade primarily benefits wealthy corporations and wealthy countries; poverty is increasing around the world despite increased free trade.

One of the most unjust aspects of the trade system is the use of agricultural subsidies by the U.S. and the European Union. The U.S. provides hundreds of billions of dollars of agricultural subsidies, most of which goes to a few large agribusinesses who control most of the agricultural production in the U.S. This allows agricultural production to occur en masse and to knock smaller competitors - in the U.S. and in developing countries - out of business. (Education for Justice, April 2, 2006)

I have worked with the Spanish speaking community for about five and a half years, and have heard many stories of why people come to the United States in spite of the strict requirements, the harsh journey, the separation of families, and the fear of an unexpected return. I also spent four months traveling in 11 Latin American countries to stay in the homes of the families who live here. Many are not just looking for an easy way to make money, and they do not want to avoid the legal process for entry. Often there is no other option. One man whom I knew for three years returned to his family. I saw him shortly after. He lamented that he had not even recognized his own young son when he returned because he had grown so much. But he also said that he had to choose between love for his family and being with them, or returning to the United States to make enough money to support his wife and four children.

The United States cannot solve the economic and political situations of all countries, yet we can promote fair and just policies that do not take advantage of them for the sake of global businesses. We can work with them to reduce indebtedness and poverty, corruption, and violence that affect the need for migration.

June 2006

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**Action:** Join Catholic Conference of KY's legislative advocacy network to influence immigration public policy. Visit our website at [www.ccky.org](http://www.ccky.org) and become a Faithful Citizen Advocate today.



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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 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.*