

What does the Church say on Immigration?
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Three Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration

First Principle: People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.

Second Principle: A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration.

Third Principle: A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

I. Biblical References on Migration

1. Old Testament

1. The Israelites' experience of living as homeless aliens was so painful and frightening that God ordered his people for all time to have special care for the alien: "You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lv 19:33-34).
2. Israel's conduct with the stranger is both an imitation of God and the primary, specific Old Testament manifestation of the great commandment to love one's neighbor: "For the Lord, your God, is the . . . Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Dt 10:17-19)

2. New Testament

1. Jesus reiterates the Old Testament command to love and care for the stranger, a criterion by which we shall be judged: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:35, 40).
2. The Apostle Paul asserts the absolute equality of all people before God: "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In Christ, the human race is one before God, equal in dignity and rights.

II. USCCB Definition's Regarding Migration(SNL)

1. Immigrant: A person who moves to another country to take up permanent residence.
2. Legal Immigrant: A person who has been admitted to reside and work on a permanent basis in the United States; admission is most commonly based on reunification with close family members or employment.
3. Undocumented immigrant: A person who is in a country without the permission of that country's government. Such persons are called "undocumented" because they lack the required paperwork.

III. Immigration in the eyes of the Church(SNL)

1. Persons have the right to find opportunities in their home land
 1. All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.
2. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families
 1. The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.(EMCC+FTB+SNL)
3. The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected
 1. Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that

respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.

4. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders
 1. The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their territories but rejects such control when it is exerted merely for the purpose of acquiring additional wealth. More powerful economic nations, which have the ability to protect and feed their residents, have a stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows.
5. Migration thus offers the *Church* a historic opportunity to prove its four characteristic marks: the Church is one because in a certain sense it also expresses the unity of the whole human family; it is holy also to make all people holy and that God's name may be sanctified in them; it is catholic furthermore in its openness to diversity that is to be harmonized; and it is likewise apostolic because it is also committed to evangelize the whole human person and all people.(EMCC)

IV. The Immigrant and her Rights

1. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance[142].”(CIVp42)
2. Persons should have the opportunity to remain in their homeland to support and to find full lives for themselves and their families. This is the ideal situation for which the world and both countries must strive: one in which migration flows are driven by choice, not necessity. Paramount to achieving this goal is the need to develop the economies of sending nations, including Mexico.(FTB)
 1. Every person has an equal right to receive from the earth what is necessary for life—food, clothing, shelter. Moreover, every person has the right to education, medical care, religion, and the expression of one's culture. In many places people live in fear, danger, or dehumanizing poverty.(FTB)
 2. 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. Unfortunately, the reality they find in host nations is frequently a source of further disappointment.(WMD2000)
 1. States with a relative abundance tend to tighten their borders under pressure from a public opinion disturbed by the inconveniences that accompany the phenomenon of immigration. Society finds itself having to deal with the "clandestine", men and women in illegal situations, without any rights in a country that refuses to welcome them, victims of organized crime or of unscrupulous entrepreneurs.(WMD2000)
 3. His irregular legal status cannot allow the migrant to lose his dignity, since he is endowed with inalienable rights, which can neither be violated nor ignored.(WMD 1996)
 4. The native does not have superior rights over the immigrant. Before God all are equal; the earth was given by God to all. When a person cannot achieve a meaningful life in his or her own land, that person has the right to move.(FTB)

V. The Roles and Duties of the Receiving Government

1. 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 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)
2. A country's regulation of borders and control of immigration must be governed by concern for all people and by mercy and justice. A nation may not simply decide that it wants to provide for its own people and no others. A sincere commitment to the needs of all must prevail. A merciful immigration policy will not force married couples or children to live separated from their families

for long periods.(FTB)

3. It is necessary to avoid recourse to the use of administrative regulations, meant to restrict the criterion of family membership which result in unjustifiably forcing into an illegal situation people whose right to live with their family cannot be denied by any law.(WMD1996))

VI. The Roles and Duties of the Receiving Community

1. The Church is conscious of her mission. She knows that Christ wanted her to be a sign of unity in the world(WMD2000)
2. Pope Paul VI, in speaking of the Church, recalled that "there is no one who is a stranger to her heart, no one in whom her ministry has no interest. She has no enemies, except those who wish to be such. Her name of Catholic is not an idle title. Not in vain has she received the commission to foster in the world unity, love and peace" (Encyclical Ecclesiam suam, n. 94).
3. The Church, Mother and Teacher, works so that every person's dignity is respected, the immigrant is welcomed as a brother or sister, and all humanity forms a united family which knows how to appreciate with discernment the different cultures which comprise it. (WMD2000)
4. As a sacrament of unity and thus a sign and a binding force for the whole human race, the Church is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters. Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble. (EMCC)
5. Undoubtedly the defense of Christian values also means no discrimination against immigrants, above all through a vigorous spiritual renewal of the faithful themselves. Fraternal dialogue and mutual respect, the living testimony of love and welcome, thus constitute in themselves the first and indispensable form of evangelization. (EMCC)
6. While individuals have the right to move in search of a safe and humane life, no country is bound to accept all those who wish to resettle there. By this principle the Church recognizes that most immigration is ultimately not something to celebrate. As Americans we should cherish and celebrate the contributions of immigrants and their cultures; however, we should work to make it unnecessary for people to leave their own land.(FTB)

VII. Suggestions for the Community and Governments

1. Elimination of global underdevelopment is the antidote to illegal immigration.(WMD1995)
2. In religious instruction and catechesis suitable means must be found to create in the Christian conscience a sense of welcome, especially for the poorest and outcasts as migrants often are. This welcome is fully based on love for Christ, in the certainty that good done out of love of God to one's neighbor, especially the most needy, is done to Him.(EMCC/TDS)The poverty and misfortune with which immigrants are stricken are yet another reason for coming generously to their aid.(WMD 1996)
3. As provided by the TDS
 1. The enactment of immigration laws in the United States and Mexico which protect the human rights of migrants and provide them with legal status in order to ensure that protection;
 2. The establishment of cooperation between the governments to eradicate human trafficking and human smuggling rings throughout the region. We stand ready to work with our governments to realize these important goals.
 3. The convening of the governments of Mexico, the United States, and Central America to address the root causes of migration in this region, including economic inequities, so that migrants may one day have the opportunity to remain at home and support their families;
4. As provided by the SNL
 1. Steps must be taken to create an environment in which force is used only in the most

necessary circumstances, and only to the extent needed, to protect the physical well-being of both the enforcement officer and the migrant. This requires not only a review and reform of enforcement tactics, but also, more importantly, a reshaping of the enforcement policies of both nations.

2. A broad legalization program of the undocumented would benefit not only the migrants but also both nations. Making legal the large number of undocumented workers from many nations who are in the United States would help to stabilize the labor market in the United States, to preserve family unity, and to improve the standard of living in immigrant communities. Moreover, migrant workers, many of whom have established roots in their communities, will continue to contribute to the U.S. economy. (SNL)
3. Legalization also would maintain the flow of remittances to Mexico and would give Mexicans safe and legal passage back to Mexico, if necessary. In addition, such legalization would promote national security by reducing fear in immigrant communities and by encouraging undocumented persons to become participating members of society. Legalization represents sound public policy and should be featured in any migration agreement between the United States and Mexico. In order to ensure fairness for all nationalities, the U.S. Congress should enact a legalization program for immigrants regardless of their country of origin.(SNL)
4. The creation of employment opportunities in Mexico would help to reduce poverty and would mitigate the incentive for many migrants to look for employment in the United States. The implementation of economic policies in Mexico that create living-wage jobs is vital, especially for Mexican citizens without advanced skills. (SNL)
5. Illegal immigration should be prevented, but it is also essential to combat vigorously the criminal activities which exploit illegal immigrants. (WMD1996)
6. Catholic social teaching is realistic: While people have the right to move, no country has the duty to receive so many immigrants that its social and economic life are jeopardized. Those who work to enforce our nation's immigration laws often do so out of a sense of loyalty to the common good and compassion for poor people seeking a better life. In an ideal world, there would be no need for immigration control.(FTB)
7. It is necessary to guard against the rise of new forms of racism or xenophobic behavior, which attempt to make these brothers and sisters of ours scapegoats for what may be difficult local situations.(WMD 1996)
8. The U.S. legal immigration system places per-country limits on visas for family members of U.S. legal permanent residents from Mexico. This cap, along with processing delays, has resulted in unacceptable waiting times for the legal reunification of a husband and wife, or of a parent and child. For example, the spouse or child of a Mexican-born legal permanent resident can wait approximately eight years to obtain a visa to join loved ones in the United States. Spouses and parents thus face a difficult decision: either honor their moral commitment to family and migrate to the United States without proper documentation, or wait in the system and face indefinite separation from loved ones.(SNL)
9. This is an unacceptable choice, and a policy that *encourages* undocumented migration. A new framework must be established that will give Mexican families more opportunities to legally reunite with their loved ones in the United States. This would help alleviate the long waiting times and, in time, would *reduce* undocumented migration between the United States and Mexico.(SNL)

VIII. Realities

1. The migrant thirsts for some gesture that will make him feel welcome, recognized and acknowledged as a person. Even just a simple greeting is one of these.(EMCC)
2. Migrants who migrate from Central America through Mexico in an attempt to reach the United States are subject to exploitation and abuse by human traffickers and smugglers and are, at times, treated harshly by Mexican law enforcement authorities. They are detained in deplorable conditions. They have no protection of law to ensure their well-being and safe passage.(TDS)
3. Persons migrate in order to support themselves and their families and intend no harm to the national security of Mexico or the United States. Yet we continue to witness that their basic

human rights and human dignity are violated.(TDS)including the use of excessive force and the shackling of migrants' hands and feet. In the United States, documented abuses of migrants occur frequently. To be sure, the large majority of Border Patrol agents conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner. But there exist those who perpetrate abuses and who are not held accountable by the U.S. Government.(SNL)

4. Often migrants are deprived of their most elementary human rights, including that of forming labor unions, when they do not become outright victims of the sad phenomenon of human trafficking, which no longer spares even children. This is a new chapter in the history of slavery. However, even without such extremes, it is necessary to reiterate that foreign workers are not to be considered merchandise or merely manpower. Therefore they should not be treated just like any other factor of production. Every migrant enjoys inalienable fundamental rights which must be respected in all cases. Furthermore the migrants' contribution to the economy of the host country comes together with the possibility for them to use their intelligence and abilities in their work.(EMCC)
5. No country today may think that it can solve migration problems on its own.(EMCC)
6. The Church encourages the ratification of the international legal instruments that ensure the rights of migrants, refugees and their families. The Church also offers its advocacy, which is more and more necessary today, through its various competent institutions and associations (as centers for migrant needs, houses open to them, offices for necessary services, documentation and counseling, etc.). This is because they often have to suffer physical, verbal and even sexual abuse, work long hours, often without the benefits of medical care and the usual forms of social security.(EMCC)
7. Under the harshest view, undocumented people may be regarded as undeserving of rights or services. This is not the view of Catholic social teaching. The Catholic Church teaches that every person has basic human rights and is entitled to have basic human needs met—food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care. Undocumented persons are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by employers, and they are not able to complain because of the fear of discovery and deportation. (FTB)
8. Of particular concern are the border enforcement policies pursued by both governments that have contributed to the abuse and even deaths of migrants in both Mexico and the United States. Along the United States-Mexico border, the U.S. government has launched several border-blockade initiatives in the past decade designed to discourage undocumented migrants from entering the country. These initiatives have been characterized by a tripling of Border Patrol agents, especially at ports of entry, and the use of sophisticated technology such as ground sensors, surveillance cameras, heat-detecting scopes, and reinforced fencing.
Rather than significantly reducing illegal crossings, the initiatives have instead driven migrants into remote and dangerous areas of the southwest region of the United States, leading to an alarming number of migrant deaths. The blockades also have contributed to an increase in migrant smuggling, in which desperate migrants pay high fees to smugglers to get them into the United States. In recent years, smuggling has become a more organized and profitable enterprise.(SNL)
9. Catholic teaching has a long and rich tradition in defending the right to migrate. Catholic teaching also states that the root causes of migration—poverty, injustice, religious intolerance, armed conflicts—must be addressed so that migrants can remain in their homeland and support their families.(SNL) Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country; and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate to other countries. (Pacem in Terris, Pope John XXIII)
10. Immigration policy that allows people to live here and contribute to society for years but refuses to offer them the opportunity to achieve legal status does not serve the common good. The presence of millions of people living without easy access to basic human rights and necessities is a great injustice. It is the position of the Catholic Church that pastoral, educational, medical, and social services provided by the Church are never conditioned on legal status. All persons are invited to participate in our parishes, attend our schools, and receive other services offered by our institutions and programs.(FTB)
11. As pastors, we are troubled by how the current amalgamation of immigration laws, policies, and actions pursued by both governments often impedes family unity. While the majority of Mexican

migrants enter the United States to find work, many cross the border to join family members.(SNL)

IX. The Church's Role

1. The Church hears the suffering cry of all who are uprooted from their own land, of families forcefully separated, of those who, in the rapid changes of our day, are unable to find a stable home anywhere. She senses the anguish of those without rights, without any security, at the mercy of every kind of exploitation, and she supports them in their unhappiness.(WMD 2000)
2. It is non-Christians, who go to countries with a Christian tradition in search of work and better living conditions, and they frequently do so as illegal immigrants and refugees. The Church, like the Good Samaritan, feels it her duty to be close to the illegal immigrant and refugee, contemporary icon of the despoiled traveler, beaten and abandoned on side of the road to Jericho (cf. Lk 10:30). She goes towards him, pouring "on his wounds the oil of consolation and the wine of hope" (Roman Missal, Common Preface VII), feeling herself called to be a living sign of Christ, who came that all might have life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10).(WMD 1997)
3. In the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere. As a sacrament of unity and thus a sign and a binding force for the whole human race, the Church is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters. It is the task of the various Dioceses actively to ensure that these people, who are obliged to live outside the safety net of civil society, may find a sense of brotherhood in the Christian community. Man, particularly if he is weak, defenseless, driven to the margins of society, is a sacrament of Christ's presence (cf. Mt 25:40, 45). Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble. 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.(WMD 1997)The first way to help these people is to listen to them ... and, whatever their legal status with regard to State law, to provide them with the necessary means of subsistence.(WMD 1996)
4. The parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:25-37) offers two particularly important clarifications. Until that time, the concept of "neighbour" was understood as referring essentially to one's countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel; in other words, to the closely-knit community of a single country or people. This limit is now abolished. Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour. The concept of "neighbour" is now universalized, yet it remains concrete. Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now.(DCE)

USCCB – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

SNL – Strangers no Longer; Statement Issued by USA USM CCB 01/22/2003 regarding immigration

TDS – Tabasco Diocese Statement; by USA and USM CCB immigration committee's issued 06/2006

WMD – Messages by P. John Paul II on World Migration Day of the given year

EMCC – Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi, Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People

CIVVS – Caritas in Veritate, Vatican provided Summary; July 7th, 2009

FTB – Fr. Thomas Betz, OFM Cap. Director of Immigration and Refugee services in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Materials and

Lectures on Immigration; as provided by said composer through the USCCB.

CIV – Caritas in Veritate, Papal Encyclical by Benedict XVI

DCE – Deus Caritas Est, Papal Encyclical by Benedict XVI

Prepared for Students for a Fair Society at Franciscan University of Steubenville

Possible Attachments: Latino/Hispanic Bishop letter to Migrants on Dec 12, 2011; Details on current possible legislation concerning migrants and their families.