



Immigration Faith and Advocacy

What do we see with Immigration and the Border? : A lack of economic opportunity, often fueled by U.S. trade and investment policies, is escalating pressure for many people living on the margins of society to migrate. At the same time, the United States is increasingly dependent on migrant labor. Nevertheless, existing policies and practices in the United States, including mass deportations, criminalization of migrants, and militarization of the southwest border, are pushing migrants deeper into the shadows of society, keeping them in a semi-permanent state of insecurity and vulnerability.

The current border wall has made no significant change to the influx of illegal drugs or to the entry of migrants and it bears only symbolic value. Worst of all, significant laws that protect human and environmental rights are being set aside to facilitate the construction of the border walls.

- Between 8.5 and 12 million undocumented workers live and work in the United States.
- Over 22,000 people are held in immigration detention on any given day. They are held in hundreds of local prisons, jails, and private contract facilities throughout the U.S. and are typically subjected to arbitrary punishment, including neglect of basic medical and hygienic needs and sexual abuse.
- Close to 3,000 migrant deaths were recorded between 1998 and 2005, with numbers increasing each year.
- Development pressure has led wealthy landowners to intimidate the residents of border towns such as Lomas del Poleo, to abandon their land. They use illegal methods such as kidnapping, rape, torture, and murder.
- In constructing this barrier, the Department of Homeland Security has dispensed with more than 30 laws enacted to protect public lands and wildlife.
- Agriculture is suffering due to the inaccessibility to the Rio Grande, leading to the loss of countless farms.

What does our faith tell us? The Bible is full of stories of refugees forced to flee their home because of persecution or insufficient means of survival, from the Israelites' Exodus to Joseph and Mary's flee away from King Herod. From these experiences, God prescribed special care and love for aliens:

He told Moses: "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"(Lv19:33-34). And through Jesus, His commandment was repeated: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). This love and care for stranger is rooted in the equal dignity and rights of people before God: "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

In his 2009 encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI calls for migration policies focused toward "safeguarding the needs and rights of individual migrants and their families, and at the same time, those of the host countries." Catholic teaching on immigration can be compiled into three guiding principles (USCCB). These are:

People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families: This principle is based on the Christian teaching that Earth and its goods belong to all people. Even though the Catholic Church recognizes the right to private property, Catholic social teaching emphasizes the use of this property should not prejudice to the common good. Moreover,



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everyone is entitled to receive what is necessary for their survival, and has the rights to medical care, education, religion, and the expression of their culture.

A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration: This Principle may seem to be in contradiction with the previous one. However, while recognizing countries' rights not to accept so many immigrants that their social and economic lives are jeopardized, Catholic social teaching emphasizes regulations should be established with the good of *all* people as the guiding principle. Immigration control should be enforced with compassion and be allied with efforts to make it unnecessary for people to leave their homeland.

A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy: This principle is particularly relevant when talking about the US-Mexican border. According to Catholic social teaching, a country's regulation of borders and control of immigration must be governed by concern for all people and by mercy and justice, in light of the absolute equality of people and the commitment to the common good. Moreover, immigration policy ought to take into account the right of families to live together. A merciful immigration policy will not force married couples or children to live separated from their families for long periods. Like any other human beings, undocumented migrants have basic human rights and are entitled to have basic human needs met—food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care. The Catholic Church also emphasizes the particular vulnerability of these people to abuses and exploitation. Therefore it sees current immigration policy that criminalizes the mere attempt to immigrate and imprisons immigrants who have committed no crime or who have already served a just sentence for a crime as immoral. We cannot excuse inhumane treatment of certain persons by claiming that their lack of legal status deprives them of rights given by the Creator. Finally, 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.

Where can I find more information in scripture about the Church's stance on immigration?

Genesis 12:1	Exodus 23:9	Job 31:32	Matthew 3:13-15
Genesis 15:13	Leviticus 19:33-34	Jeremiah 22:3	Matthew 25:31-46
Genesis 46(:5-6)	Ezekiel 47: 21-23	Ephesians 2:19-20	Deuteronomy 10:17-19

We call on Congress to enact legislation on Comprehensive Immigration Reform that includes:

- Provisions for timely family reunification.
- Opportunities for hard-working migrants already in the U.S. to regularize their status through a system that is simple, fair, and accessible, providing avenues to citizenship for those who desire it.
- Effective oversight mechanisms that support community security, human rights and accountability, particularly in the U.S.-Mexico border region.
- A safe and dignified way for future migrants to enter and work in the country legally.
- The repealing of the Real ID Act waiver authority.
- Funds to mitigate damage to communities and natural resources along the border.



How do I contact my members of Congress?

Who are my members of Congress? How do I find out?

Contact your members of Congress and let them know you support comprehensive immigration reform by writing letters or emails, sending a fax, or calling.

To find out your who your representative and 2 senators are, click:

<http://whoismyrepresentative.com/>

To go directly to your representative's website to send them a direct email, click:

<https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>

To go directly to your Senator's webmail, click;

http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

Make a phone call

A letter is more powerful than a phone call, but both do help!

When you call Congress offices, it often helps to have key points written down before the call so you do not inadvertently miss anything. When you call, you will be speaking with the receptionist in your member of Congress's office. He/she may transfer you to your member's staffer who handles immigration issues. Most likely you will leave a message, but sometimes the staffers do answer the phone, so be prepared either way.

Sample phone script:

Hello. My name is _____, and I live in (name city or district). I would like to speak with the Senator/Representative about (name bill, bill number, issue, etc.).

Write a letter

People who think members of Congress pay little or no attention to constituent mail are plain wrong! Concise, well thought out personal letters are one of the most effective ways we have of influencing law-makers. However, members of Congress get hundreds of letters and emails every day. Whether you choose to use snail mail, fax, or email, here are some tips that will help your letter have impact.

An effective letter to Congress needs only 3 things:

1. **Write your name and address on the letter *and* on the envelope.** Members of Congress want to know that you are one of the people they represent.
2. **Ask for a specific action from Congress.** Use the sentences below or your own words. For example: "I ask you to support the bill (name bill) introduced in Congress in January 2010." Or "I ask you to consider those who do not have a voice in this matter because they are children. Please support children of undocumented migrants."



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3. **Give a reason.** Barack Obama's favorite phrase is, "I received a letter from..." What moves him to talk about these letters? Your story. Your reason. Your impetus for writing. Say something about your motivation and/or state a fact.

For example:

- In the United States, 35 million people live in families that struggle to put food on the table. Some of the poorest areas in the country are rural.
- Our current farm policy provides large dividends to corporations but little to family farmers.

Other points to consider:

- If a certain bill is involved, cite the correct title or number. You can find it on www.thomas.gov.
- When referencing a bill in the Senate, it's S.# (i.e. S.5555). In the House it's: H.R.5555
- State any professional credentials or personal experience you may have, especially those pertaining to the subject of your letter
- Keep your letter short - one page is best
- Use specific examples or evidence to support your position

Addressing Members of Congress

Use these addresses in email messages as well as snail mail or faxed letters.

Letter to your Senator:

Senator (full name)

(Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Letter to your Representative:

Representative (full name)

(Room #) (Name) House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator:

Dear Representative:

Sample letter:

Dear Senator/Representative _____,

As you consider Comprehensive Immigration Reform, I ask you to acknowledge our country's deeply flawed immigration system, and the critical need to not only affect change, but also improve our country and the countless lives affected. Your action on this matter will demonstrate your commitment towards protecting vulnerable populations and communities, valuing family unity, and creating a safer, more just environment for all who call the United States home.

My faith compels me to strongly value family unity and the protection of human rights. *[Include personal examples and reasons why this matters to you!]* In order to uphold human dignity, we as a nation must recognize the need to fix our broken immigration system and take decisive action to heal this country and its families.

I urge you to support comprehensive immigration reform. A more broad-based approach towards immigration in our nation is an essential step towards creating a more just world that promotes human dignity for all.

Sincerely,



How can I stay aware of legislation and politics involving issues of Immigration and the Border?

Websites:

www.justiceforimmigrants.org – Immigration campaign run by USCCB

www.usccb.org/mrs - USCCB Migration and Refugee Service website

www.columban.org/content/view/73/65/ Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach's position on migration issues

www.usccb.org/mrs/pastoralstatements.shtml - pastoral statements and letters regarding immigration

<http://reformimmigrationforamerica.org/> faith based group advocating for immigration reform

www.sojourners.com faith, politics, and culture magazine

www.nnirr.org National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

www.immigrationforum.org National Immigration Forum

More:

Google and get involved in immigration groups in your local area

Become a "friend" on Facebook of the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Read the CCAO's monthly newsletter <http://www.columban.org> – Justice and Peace page, or email ccaoprograms@columban.org to receive the monthly online newsletter

Follow HR 4321 - Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act

- To follow legislation, go to www.thomas.gov and type in HR 4321
- To watch any hearings in person (in DC) or via satellite, go to <http://www.thomas.gov/home/schedules.html> to see schedules. Your best bet is to click on the Senate Committee Hearing Schedule as it is updated the most often. Generally hearings are scheduled a day to a few weeks in advance.