



FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP 2012

This series has been prepared by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference as a guide for those who wish to inform their consciences in order to participate more fully in the political process. To learn more about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (FCFC), visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org and www.wisconsinatholic.org.

Third in a four-part series

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Why is religious liberty vital?

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, the right to religious freedom and freedom of conscience is “based on the very nature of the human person, whose dignity enables him freely to assent to the divine truth....” (n. 2106) This freedom must never be coerced, for to do so is to injure human beings in their relationship with God.



WHEN GOVERNMENTS ARE ALLOWED TO DECIDE WHICH ORGANIZATIONS ARE SUFFICIENTLY RELIGIOUS TO MERIT CONSCIENCE PROTECTIONS, THEN RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS UNDERMINED.

What does religious freedom contribute to society?

“Religious liberty,” the U.S. bishops have recently written, “is our American heritage, our most cherished freedom.” (*Our First, Most Cherished Liberty*, 2012) This heritage has enabled generations of Americans from every faith or no faith to live, prosper, and contribute to the common good. People of all faiths have been at the forefront of movements to improve the lives of others – from ending the slave trade, to the civil rights movement, from erecting hospitals and schools, to ministering to the incarcerated, the homeless, and the hungry.

What are some of the main threats to religious liberty in the U.S.?

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services mandate to force almost all employers, including those who object on religious grounds, to provide free coverage for contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs in their insurance plans.
- State immigration laws prohibiting individuals and churches from giving any assistance to undocumented immigrants.
- State laws forcing Catholic foster care and adoption agencies to disband because they refuse to place children in the homes of same-sex couples or cohabitating opposite-sex couples.
- The ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Employment Division v. Smith* holding that limits on religion are acceptable so long as a law of general applicability treats religious activity the same as other behavior.
- A federal requirement to force humanitarian agencies that assist victims of human trafficking to provide or refer for contraceptive and abortion services.



IMMIGRATION REFORM

Why is the Church committed to immigration reform?

As the Wisconsin bishops wrote in their 2012 pastoral letter, "Traveling Together in Hope":

"As Catholics, we uphold the sanctity and dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death. We affirm that every human being is created in God's image through His boundless love. Just as we work to protect the innocent unborn, 40 million of whom have already lost their lives, so we cannot turn our backs on the 12 million immigrants in our midst who long to live freely and fully."

But isn't the real issue the fact that many immigrants enter and reside illegally?

Wisconsin's bishops acknowledge that the rule of law is essential to maintaining a stable society. However, they explain that Americans "have to acknowledge that some of our foreign and domestic policies and practices have contributed to the illegal entry of immigrants. Our nation's incessant demand for inexpensive goods and services is one of the driving forces behind the export of American jobs and the hiring of immigrant workers. Our nation is a magnet for immigrants because there is work here and because of the international disparity in wages. Our aging population needs younger workers."

The most important reason, however, is that there is a mismatch between the legal supply and economic demand for immigrant labor. Simply put, the U.S. does not issue sufficient work visas to meet our nation's demand for labor.

THE GOSPEL MANDATE TO
"WELCOME THE STRANGER"
REQUIRES CATHOLICS TO CARE FOR
AND STAND WITH IMMIGRANTS,
BOTH DOCUMENTED AND
UNDOCUMENTED.

What does comprehensive reform look like?

Comprehensive immigration reform should include "a temporary work program with worker protections and a path to permanent residency; family reunification policies; a broad and fair legalization program; access to legal protections, including due process and essential public programs; refuge for those fleeing persecution and exploitation; and policies to address the root causes of migration. The right and responsibility of nations to control their borders and to maintain the rule of law should be recognized." (FCFC 83)



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