

Traveling Together in Hope

A Pastoral Letter on Immigration
from the Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin



*D*ear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*O*ver the course of two thousand years, the Catholic Church has developed a special expertise in the area of immigration. Our universal Church has observed and participated in migrations all across the globe. We have helped millions of immigrants – Catholic and non-Catholic – to prosper in new lands. We have done so and will continue to do so because we see the image and likeness of God in every human being. From the Prophets to recent papal teaching, the Church has a consistent message: welcome the stranger (Mt 25:35).

*W*e recognize that Catholics, all in good conscience, hold differing views about U.S. immigration policy. We also know that many are dissatisfied with the status quo and are looking for a workable solution. Our Catholic teaching provides important principles to guide us.

*O*ur *Catechism* addresses directly the duty of wealthy nations like ours to welcome foreigners who are searching for a better life and to respect their natural right to emigrate. At the same time, it recognizes the right of governments to regulate immigration for the sake of the common good (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed., n. 2241). This duty and this right are not incompatible; it is possible to respect both.

*M*ost Americans recognize that we are a nation of immigrants. At the same time, many are deeply troubled that millions of immigrants reside in the U.S. without legal authorization. We too share this concern; obeying laws is essential to any stable society. As Americans, however, we have to acknowledge that some of our foreign and domestic policies and practices have contributed to the illegal entry of immigrants.

*O*ur 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. Entire economic sectors – service, construction, agriculture – would falter without immigrant labor. Here in Wisconsin, our dairy industry relies heavily on immigrants.

*T*he tremendous economic pull overwhelms our inadequate immigration system, and our failure to reform the system effectively ensures illegal entry. The U.S. provides only 5,000 permanent and 66,000 temporary visas annually to low-wage workers wishing to enter this country, a total far below the number of workers needed by key sectors of our economy. As a result, immigrants take the risk of working here illegally.

*L*arge migrations are always accompanied by cultural tensions between citizens and immigrants. There is often a long period of adjustment for both groups. This is especially true in difficult economic times. Many who fear for their jobs see immigrants as competitors. Others worry that immigrants threaten our culture. Our nation has experienced this tension before when waves of immigrants from Poland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and China – to name just a few – were once considered undesirables and faced open discrimination.

In spite of all the challenges they faced, however, these and other immigrants helped build our nation. Again and again, America has demonstrated that its highest ideals – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – can be embraced and reinvigorated by people from all around the world who come to our country searching for a better way of life.

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.

Let us then commit ourselves to helping resolve this pressing immigration crisis. We do so not just for our nation’s sake, but also for the sake of millions of children and adults who live fearfully in the shadows, who are vulnerable to exploitation, whose family members are being cruelly isolated, detained, and deported.

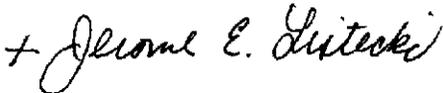
We therefore urge all Catholics to take the following steps to help resolve the present crisis:

- **Pray** for immigrants, lawmakers, and for one another as we address this challenge.
- **Read** the accompanying Questions and Answers resource and visit the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) *Justice for Immigrants* website (www.justiceforimmigrants.org) for additional resources.
- **Educate** fellow citizens and legislators about the need for comprehensive immigration reform – a reform that is not a blanket amnesty, but rather a path to citizenship that includes restitution where it is owed.
- **Reject** state and federal legislation that unfairly profiles or discriminates against immigrants.
- **Reach out** to immigrants and begin building communities of hope.

For our part, as your bishops, we commit ourselves to welcoming all – whether documented or undocumented – in our parishes and Church institutions.

Our Catholic faith can and must transcend political and cultural turmoil. Let us remember that in the end we are all migrants on this earth, traveling together in hope towards our loving God. May Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of the Americas, protect us on our journey.

Sincerely yours in Christ,


The Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKi
Archbishop of Milwaukee


The Most Reverend David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay


The Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino
Bishop of Madison


The Most Reverend William P. Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse


The Most Reverend Peter F. Christensen
Bishop of Superior

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