

The Catholic Bishops of New Jersey Call for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

New Jersey always has been a safe haven for immigrants seeking a better life. For well over a century, the Catholic Church in New Jersey has welcomed millions of individuals and families as they began new lives in our parishes.

Today, as our Church continues to minister to hundreds of thousands of immigrants, we, the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey, lend our voice to the growing call for our government to enact comprehensive immigration reform.

As with all things, we begin by calling Catholics throughout the State to pause to pray for their brothers and sisters who have come to New Jersey as immigrants. Over the coming months, we will be joined by priests and deacons to speak out and preach on the importance of our nation addressing the moral issue of immigration reform.

We need to pray because of the failure of our current immigration policies. We need to pray because families are being divided, migrant workers are being exploited, and the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters are being denied basic human rights. Clearly, comprehensive immigration reform is a humanitarian issue with moral implications.

Today we also speak out because our immigrant brothers and sisters are making significant contributions to our economy and especially to our parishes and reform at the federal level will enable even greater contributions to our nation's economic and cultural wellbeing.

Most importantly, we speak out because Jesus told us that we will be judged by how well we fulfill our responsibility to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to cloth the naked, and to welcome the stranger (Matthew 25:35).

What should comprehensive reform include?

In their 2003 pastoral letter, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) outlined several principles for immigration reform. A decade later those principles still provide a foundation for immigration reform. Those principles include:

- A path to citizenship for the undocumented that is achievable, is set within a reasonable time frame, and includes the maximum number of persons;
- A system that protects the integrity of families;
- A program that allows low-skilled migrant workers to enter and work in the United States legally and safely, providing them with the option to apply for permanent residency and eventual citizenship;

We thank the many parishes, religious communities and immigration service centers in our dioceses who strive daily and tirelessly to welcome the immigrant, and are poised to do even more. We thank civic communities who have widened their own circles of welcome. We thank members of Congress who work on a bi-partisan basis to break through barriers that are delaying action on immigration reform. Yes, we are thankful for what already is being done, but as a Church and a nation, we need to do much, much more.

What can Catholics do to support Comprehensive Immigration Reform?

- Certainly, Catholics should be faithful to Jesus' call for His followers to welcome strangers and to more deeply practice hospitality.
- Catholics, and indeed all Christians, have an obligation to be informed on the issues that relate to justice for immigrants. USCCB's Justice for Immigrants (JFI) website is a rich resource to assist parishes, schools, and other organizations in discussions on the importance of immigration reform at: <http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/parish-kit.shtml>.
- Most importantly, Catholics should pray for the safety and well-being of all the people living in our great nation including the undocumented.
- Finally, we the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey ask our parishioners to contact their members of Congress and their two United States Senators to ask them to support comprehensive immigration reform.

Now is a time to take action to end how we treat so many of our brothers and sisters as virtual nonpersons. Now is a time to welcome brothers and sisters as strangers no more.

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Most Reverend Yousef Habash
Bishop, Eparchy of Our Lady of Deliverance

Most Reverend David M. O'Connell, C.M.
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Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V.
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Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli
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