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"We call upon all people of good will, but Catholics especially, to welcome the newcomers in their neighborhoods and schools, in their places of work and worship, with heartfelt hospitality, openness, and eagerness both to help and to learn from our brothers and sisters of whatever religion, ethnicity, or background."

Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity
A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, November 2000



I Was A Stranger

Perhaps no organization has been more outspoken in defending the rights and human dignity of immigrants than the Catholic Church. The essence of the Church's teaching may be found in Matthew's Gospel: *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (Mt 25:35). From this two thousand year history of advocating for migrant peoples, the Church teaches that every human being is deserving of dignity and should be treated by others as such. This teaching applies to the public policy arena, as the bishops of the Church in the United States have stated repeatedly that the country's inefficient immigration system contributes to the human suffering of migrants and, as teachers of the faith, the bishops continue to draw attention to the moral consequences of an ineffective system.

Immigration has become one of the most divisive issues in the nation as the federal government has yet to formulate a public policy that repairs an archaic and incoherent system. There have been few efforts to reform immigration policy in the last thirty years, most notably the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. This legislation legalized approximately three million persons and created penalties for businesses that knowingly hired illegal entrants, but failed to address "future flows" of immigrants. Since 1990, the estimated number of undocumented persons in this country has grown exponentially from approximately three

million to well over ten million.

Each year some 300,000 to 500,000 persons arrive in the United States without documentation. At the same time, the federal government has spent nearly 25 billion dollars since 1993 to secure the U.S.-Mexico border. During that period, the number of border patrol agents has tripled and, tragically, more than 2,700 migrants have died in the deserts of the American Southwest. To the north, the entrance of illicit drugs and other illegal activity continues to plague the U.S.-Canada border, which is twice as long as the border with Mexico and has a much more dense population line. The country's immigration policy is clearly failing, and the fact that Congress has yet to formulate a comprehensive approach to reforming the immigration system exacerbates the problem.

The purpose of this edition of Focus is to publish a statement from the Roman Catholic bishops in Michigan on immigration, in English and in Spanish, and to provide additional resources that Catholics may find helpful toward understanding the Catholic Church's teaching on immigration. The bishops' statement articulates the Church's support for migrant peoples, it speaks to state immigration matters that have arisen, and it calls on the Michigan congressional delegation to assist in efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform in Washington, D.C. ■

Michigan Bishops’ Statement on Immigration

We, the Roman Catholic Bishops in Michigan, bring our voices as teachers of the faith to the ongoing public debate over immigration policy. We do so with deep concern about the effectiveness of the nation’s immigration system and the lack of a consistent federal policy that addresses the common good for all peoples in the country.

We support the positive impact migrant communities have made in our country, and especially in our state. We recognize the right of our country to regulate its own borders to control immigration. We believe that borders must be regulated with justice and mercy as people have a God-given right to migrate when necessary to sustain their lives and their families. We empathize with those children born in the United States who later see their parents deported while the children are still minors. We realize that an ineffective immigration system has in some places and at some times led to negative ramifications, such as increased crime and a proliferation of the drug trade.

While these national immigration problems must be resolved, it is unfair and mistaken to blame the undocumented for problems more accurately attributed to a failed policy. The federal government has the responsibility to enact and enforce laws that treat migrant peoples with

the same dignity as its native-born citizens. As such, there must be a concerted effort to find a pathway toward citizenship for undocumented persons who live here, who work here, have raised a family here and have contributed to the common good.

Because Congress has yet to develop a comprehensive immigration policy, the reality is that state legislatures are attempting to address this issue. We acknowledge the state’s authority to enact its own legislation; however, continued failure at the federal level to enact comprehensive immigration reform does not mean that the state should pursue policies more appropriately addressed by national immigration authorities and the United States Congress.

Should our state policy-makers debate immigration legislation we, as moral leaders and teachers of faith, believe any proposed measure must strive to:

- Uphold the human dignity of all persons and work against any injustice which would compromise the dignity of immigrants.
- Promote and give priority to the reunification of families.
- Recognize the rich contribution to the community by those immigrants and migrants who work and live here.

As the national immigration debate lingers, we encourage all Catholics to turn to the rich and long-standing teachings of the Church on immigration and the proper dignity that must be afforded to all human persons. *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (Matthew 25:35). We encourage members of the Michigan Legislature to reject measures that impugn immigrants—especially the undocumented; and we encourage the Michigan congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. to contribute to federal efforts that seek to fix the nation’s immigration system. ■

Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron
Archbishop of Detroit

Most Reverend Bernard A. Hebda
Bishop of Gaylord
Most Reverend Walter A. Hurley
Bishop of Grand Rapids

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo
Most Reverend Earl A. Boyea
Bishop of Lansing

Most Reverend Alexander K. Sample
Bishop of Marquette
Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone
Bishop of Saginaw

Declaraciones de los Obispos de Michigan Sobre la Inmigración

Nosotros, los obispos católicos romanos en Michigan, traemos nuestras voces como maestros de la fe al debate público sobre la política migratoria. Lo hacemos con profunda preocupación acerca de la efectividad del sistema migratorio de la nación y la falta de una política pública federal coherente que trabaje por el bien común de todos en el país.

Apoyamos el impacto positivo que las comunidades migrantes han tenido en nuestro país y especialmente en nuestro estado. Reconocemos el derecho de nuestro país de regular sus propias fronteras para controlar la inmigración. Creemos que las fronteras deben ser reguladas con justicia y misericordia, ya que la gente tiene un derecho divino a emigrar cuando es necesario para preservar sus vidas y mantener a sus familias. Nos solidarizamos con los niños nacidos en los Estados Unidos que luego ven a sus padres ser deportados, mientras los hijos son aún menores de edad. Estamos conscientes de que un sistema migratorio ineficaz tiene ramificaciones negativas en algunos lugares y en algunos momentos, tales como un aumento en la delincuencia y la proliferación del tráfico de drogas.

Si bien estos problemas nacionales de inmigración deben ser resueltos, es injusto y equivocado culpar a los indocumentados por los problemas, que con mayor exactitud pueden ser atribuidos a una política fracasada. El gobierno federal tiene la responsabilidad de promulgar y aplicar leyes

que traten a las personas inmigrantes con la misma dignidad a que sus ciudadanos nativos. Como tal, debe haber un esfuerzo concertado para encontrar una vía hacia la ciudadanía para los indocumentados que viven aquí, que trabajan aquí, han formado una familia aquí y han contribuido al bien común.

Debido a que el Congreso aún tiene que desarrollar una política migratoria integral, la realidad es que las legislaturas estatales están tratando de resolver este problema. Reconocemos la autoridad del estado para promulgar su propia legislación, sin embargo, el continuo fracaso a nivel federal para aprobar una reforma migratoria integral no significa que el estado deba aplicar políticas que deben ser resueltas más apropiadamente por las autoridades nacionales de inmigración y el Congreso de los Estados Unidos.

En caso de que los políticos de nuestro estado debatan las leyes de inmigración, nosotros, como líderes morales y maestros de la fe, creemos que la medida propuesta debe:

- Respetar la dignidad humana de todas las personas y trabajar contra cualquier injusticia que pueda comprometer la dignidad de los inmigrantes.
- Promover y dar prioridad a la reunificación de las familias.
- Reconocer la valiosa contribución a la comunidad que hacen los inmigrantes y los migrantes que trabajan y viven aquí.

A medida que el debate nacional sobre inmigración se prolonga, alentamos a todos los católicos a que recurran a las ricas y antiguas enseñanzas de la Iglesia sobre la inmigración y la dignidad que debe proporcionarse a todos los seres humanos. *“Yo era un forastero y me diste la bienvenida”* (Mateo 25:35). Alentamos a los miembros de la legislatura de Michigan a rechazar las medidas que atentan contra los inmigrantes, especialmente los indocumentados y alentamos a la delegación de Michigan en el Congreso en Washington, DC, para que contribuyan a los esfuerzos federales que tratan de arreglar el sistema de inmigración del país. ■

Reverendísimo Allen H. Vigneron

Arzobispo de Detroit

Reverendísimo Bernard A. Hebda

Obispo de Gaylord

Reverendísimo Walter A. Hurley

Obispo de Grand Rapids

Reverendísimo Paul J. Bradley

Obispo de Kalamazoo

Reverendísimo Earl A. Boyea

Obispo de Lansing

Reverendísimo Alexander K. Sample

Obispo de Marquette

Reverendísimo Joseph R. Cistone

Obispo de Saginaw

Online Resources for Further Reading

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

CLINIC is a 501 (c)(3) organization created by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to support a rapidly growing network of community-based immigration programs.

www.cliniclegal.org

Catholic News Service

“Pope Appeals for Rights of Migrant and Refugee Children.”
November 30, 2009.

www.usccb.org/mrs/mrp.shtml

FOCUS: On Immigration

Michigan Catholic Conference publication that includes a statement from the Catholic Bishops in Michigan calling for federal comprehensive immigration reform. May 2008.

www.micatholicconference.org/onimmigration/

Justice for Immigrants Campaign

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ advocacy organization calling for comprehensive immigration reform in Congress.

www.justiceforimmigrants.org

Papal Messages on Migration: 1996-2010

Messages on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees.

www.usccb.org/mrs/papalstatements.shtml

Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People

www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/index.htm

Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope

A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States. January 2003.

www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Office of Migration and Refugee Services

www.usccb.org/mrs/

Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity

A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops. November 2000.

www.usccb.org/mrs/unity.shtml

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