

“Justice for Immigrants”:
Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform

May 9, 2005

Most Rev. Gustavo Garcia-Siller, MSpS, Auxiliary Bishop

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for coming.

We stand before you today as a community of Catholics whose ministries of Peace and Justice, Catholic Charities, and Ethnic Ministries assist the diverse immigrant community in the Archdiocese of Chicago. We also come to you allied with our sisters and brothers from the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Services and the Midwest Center for Immigrant and Human Rights, who support us and who themselves provide valuable services to our community. Representatives of all these ministries will be available after our brief remarks to tell you about their work.

We asked you to join us, so that we might express our public and enthusiastic support for the newest effort of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Tomorrow morning, in Washington, D.C., the Bishops will launch the *Justice for Immigrants* campaign – designed to educate Catholics across our nation about the need for comprehensive immigration reform. We believe that the *Justice for Immigrants* effort is timely because we understand that a number of legislative proposals will soon be introduced about this issue -- and because we know that the majority of Americans believe that the current immigration system is broken.

In just a minute, Bishop Manz will address the specifics of the U.S. Bishops’ proposals to reform our current immigration system --- including proposals for what any new legislation should address so that the dignity of all affected by this issue is honored.

But I would like to frame the issue in the way I know it best: with Catholic eyes, mindful of the Gospel and of our own rich history of social teaching.

When Our Lord told us that in welcoming a stranger, we welcome Him – we know this to be so, because we have known Him when we’ve been welcomed. When we say that there must be a more intelligent and respectful way to have a public discussion on an issue that can and has divided families – we speak with the knowledge of those who have heard the cries of families unnaturally separated through existing immigration policies. When we suggest that a first principle regarding any discussion of immigration reform must be that immigrants deserve the respect due every child of God because they are human, and our brothers and sisters – we echo Catholic teaching over the centuries that all human beings are sacred because they are created and loved by God.

And when we acknowledge that this conversation necessarily must involve concerns for national security, we do so as relatives and friends and brothers and sisters in the Lord who lost part of ourselves on September 11, 2001.

Of course, I stand here as an immigrant myself, one who was lovingly welcomed in recent years within this Chicago community by the Catholic Church family in all its diversity. And it’s been my experience that, as a nation of immigrants, Americans as a whole are fair and open-minded to people who want to seek shelter within our country and who want to work hard here on behalf of their families. I know they rightfully have deep concerns about fairness that must be addressed if comprehensive immigration reform is to be successful.

But I also know that many other immigrants have not enjoyed the same warm welcome I received – and have not been made to feel as personally or societally valuable. They do not even have a “status” –and it is for them, and for us all, that we are here today to ask Catholics in particular, and people of good will in general, to consider with us what fair and effective immigration reform could look like.

As I turn things over now to Bishop Manz, who is himself a member of the Migration and Refugee Services Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and who will address the specific goals of this effort, I'd like to invite you to accompany us on this journey to welcome the strangers in our midst. I believe that, together, in good will and by God's grace, changing our minds and hearts towards a greater civilization of love, we could gain far more than we expect.

God who created us, and who created this world, help us to live in it with a dignity that every human being deserves.