



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform **Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope**

IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION BACKGROUND:

A record high of more than 34 million foreign-born persons reside in the United States. In the past 20 years, about 23 million newcomers have arrived. This immigration growth has had a profound impact on the Church, with as many as 300,000 Catholics arriving each year from all regions of the world.

At the same time, U.S. immigration laws and policies have become increasingly restrictive and even harmful to some immigrants and asylum seekers. Between 8 and 10 million people in the U.S. live on the margins of our society for lack of proper immigration documentation. U.S. residents who want to reunite with close family members must often wait 10, 15, and even more years before visas for their relatives become available. Border enforcement strategies employed along our southern border have resulted in thousands of deaths and asylum seekers who flee persecution in their home countries and look for safe haven in the U.S. often find themselves detained as criminals for lengthy periods of time.

THE US CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS AND IMMIGRATION:

The bishops believe U.S. immigration policy should protect the human rights and dignity of newcomers, as well as provide legal and secure means of entry for prospective immigrants and asylum seekers. The bishops also acknowledge with concern a growing public sentiment that has led to these more restrictive immigration laws and policies. Additionally, the bishops recognize that the conditions that compel people to leave their homes out of desperation and lack of opportunity to provide for themselves and their families must be addressed if an effective and comprehensive response to migration is to be achieved.

The U.S. Catholic bishops announced in June 2005 the *Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope, The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform*. One of the goals is to try to change laws, as stated by Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, “so immigrants can support their families in dignity, families can remain united, and the human rights of all are respected.” Yet, the bishops also recognize that the campaign must include not only legislative reform but also an educational effort to reform public attitudes, including those of Catholics. Cardinal McCarrick made this point clear, saying “before we can change our laws we must also change attitudes, including those of many of our own flock.”



THE CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM GOALS:

- To educate Catholics and others of good will about the benefits of immigration and the benefits of immigrants to our nation;
- To strengthen public opinion about the positive contributions of immigrants
- To advocate for just immigration laws which promote legal status and legal pathways for migrant workers and their families to migrate in a safe, humane, and orderly manner; and
- To organize Catholic legal service networks to assist immigrants in accessing the benefits of reforms.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES:

- Developing and mobilizing grassroots networks, including broad coalitions, at the diocesan, parish, and community levels to engage in public education and advocacy;
- Media outreach;
- Pursuing legislative strategies; and
- Development of an interactive website and various educational and advocacy materials.

ACTIVITIES DONE IN CHICAGO TO DATE:

- Hosted a press conference in Archdiocesan offices in early May with Auxiliary Bishops John Manz and Gustavo Garcia-Siller, launching the Archdiocese's immigration campaign in simultaneous conjunction with the USCCB announcement
- Sent a packet of information to all parishes, which included a cover letter detailing the campaign, scriptural passages and Church teaching, and prayer intentions for masses
- Participating as a lead member of a large coalition of partners, ranging from labor, business, government, and faith, to effectively coordinate the larger Chicagoland immigration reform campaign
- Invited Catholic leaders in the Archdiocese in early June to listen to a presentation by representatives of Migration and Refugee Services of the USCCB detailing the status of the national campaign and answering questions about local strategy
- Prepared overlapping Vicariate maps with congressional districts to strategically determine parishes and Church areas that will be most effective in the advocacy campaign for legislative reform
- Formed an archdiocesan task force with various representatives from archdiocesan agencies, institutions, movements and networks
- Initiated developing an archdiocesan plan to implement strategies for parish outreach, advocacy, media and grassroots
- Initiated formation of priests network to participate in various educational and advocacy initiatives

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