

Pax Christi USA

Statement on Immigration Reform

“Do not mistreat the foreigners who reside in your land. The foreigner who lives among you must be treated like one of your own. Love them as you love yourself, for you too were a stranger in the land of Egypt. I am Yhwh.” (Leviticus 19: 33-34)

Pax Christi USA

NATIONAL
CATHOLIC
PEACE
MOVEMENT



Pax Christi USA, a national Catholic organization that promotes peace-making and the spirituality of non-violence, joins the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and our sisters and brothers of all denominations and traditions, as well as local and national organizations, in calling on Congress to stop the delays immediately and pass humane and just comprehensive immigration reform legislation.

Pax Christi USA acknowledges that:

Americans are deeply troubled and divided by the challenges facing our nation. Many experience a sense of hopelessness and are pained by the high rate of unemployment, inadequate health care coverage, and inability to take care of one's family. PCUSA is in solidarity with all our suffering sisters and brothers at this time of crisis.

For many generations U.S. economic and foreign policies, and most recently international trade agreements, promote and favor the globalization of culture and the economy. These policies have had devastating consequences among families in many communities far from our sight. As Americans we enjoy the benefits of globalization, but are alarmed and frightened when the affected families from other parts of the world risk all to come to the land of plenty.

The paradox is that immigrants, who now number over 11 million people without required documents, are the victims of our prosperity. Yet they are blamed for the nations' economic woes

and are demonized as a threat to American security. The "war on terror" that brought fear to all Americans during the Bush era, has now become the "war at home." "The war at home" gives local enforcement authorities the power to act as an arm of Federal Agents in arresting immigrants, even for minor offenses.

The divisions within our nation are especially felt by immigrant individuals and families. They live in constant fear of being detained, separated from their loved ones, and deported if arrested. They see no future or opportunities for their families in their home country. Immigrant families come with their young children to find that hope. These children know only one home and identify with one nation, the United States. PCUSA believes all immigrants and their families have earned the right to U.S. citizenship.

Pax Christi USA calls on its members and all Catholics to:

Remember our ancestors and their plight as the unwelcome strangers of their generation, for they too were mistreated, abused and demonized for their skin color and for speaking a foreign language. They too were seen as the cause of problems by local and parish communities and were political fodder for those who would take advantage of their situation.

Reject the demonization and scapegoating of immigrants by media and political figures who exploit their situation and sow fear as a political strategy.

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Immigration Policy is Keeping Families in Poverty

[I]t is important that communities do not think that they have completed their duty to migrants simply by performing acts of fraternal assistance or even by supporting legislation aimed at giving them their due place in society while respecting their identity as foreigners. Christians must in fact promote an authentic culture of welcome capable of accepting the truly human values of the immigrants over and above any difficulties caused by living together with persons who are different... Christians will accomplish all this by means of a truly fraternal welcome in the sense of St Paul's admonition, "Welcome one another then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rm 15:7) - PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, Erga migrantes caritas Christi (The love of Christ towards migrants)

The far-reaching damage to communities and families created by public policies that have been shaped by an "enforcement-first" attitude, such as the Rockefeller Drug Laws, has been well-documented. Currently, the arguments of homeland security and the rule of law which seek to criminalize the human right of migration are prevailing in the immigration "debate" and are providing the veil of legitimacy for oppressive laws and immigration policies resulting in the deepening and perpetuating of poverty.

Some of these laws deal specifically with immigration, but limits on benefits, entitlements and even human rights are being attached to all kinds of laws and policies which reach far beyond the border and persecute immigrants, both undocumented and legal permanent residents. They exist at the federal, state and local level in part due to the vacuum created by the inaction of legislators in Washington, but also are a reflection of a punitive attitude toward immigration policy.

What everyone needs to understand about immigration enforcement is that it is extremely costly and it separates families. In 1996, when the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRRA) was passed, detention became mandatory for those suspected of immigration violations (a civil offense under federal law). This quickly expanded a system of administrative detention comprised of about 3,000 beds to over 30,000 and growing.

The United States will spend nearly \$2 billion on detention alone this year and billions more on raids and border enforcement. Just like the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the war on immigrants is stealing money that could be used on much-needed social programs. The Obama

Administration, while promising to fight for comprehensive immigration reform, has also promised heightened enforcement. By the end of this year nearly 400,000 people will have passed through the immigration detention system and almost as many will have been deported. These are statistics that Janet Napolitano, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, regularly touts as a significant accomplishment.

Those in detention include not only the undocumented, but also legal permanent residents, all of whom may be the primary breadwinners and caregivers to young children -- including children who are U.S. citizens. Some 4 million children live in mixed immigration status families, where at least one parent is undocumented. Arguably millions more live in families where one parent is a legal permanent resident, who, because of the IIRRA, are at much greater risk of mandatory detention and deportation for minor, non-violent offenses. Also because of the IIRA those who are deported are likely to be barred from re-entering the United States for a minimum of ten years, if not for life.

The families of U.S. citizen children who have at least one parent who has been deported must make a series of heart-wrenching decisions. Do they live separated? Do they leave their children in the care of another, possibly in foster-care? Do the children return to the home country of their parents, effectively living in exile? No matter how they choose to answer, the emotional and economic burden which will be placed on these families is tremendous. The stress on the social fabric and the burden to social institutions created by children living in single-parent families is also great and has also been well-documented.

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Challenging the Politics of Fear

Challenging the Politics of Fear: Standing with Our Immigrant Brothers & Sisters

A Pax Christi USA Call to Action

During this past election season we witnessed a sharp rise in the politics of fear and division in our nation. Politicians and pundits, seeking to take advantage of the economic insecurity experienced by so many, are quick to provide convenient scapegoats to blame for all our problems. Sadly, today's scapegoats are our immigrant sisters and brothers, those who are almost always the most vulnerable and least able to defend themselves.

For some in the White Community feeling threatened by the demographic changes in this country, having a black-skinned president confirms their worst fears about their place in the social order and the loss of unearned white privilege. Unfortunately many political and corporate opportunists are eager to prey upon these fears for their own vested interests. Instead of encouraging the nation to reach across the boundaries of race, class and religion, they spread division and fear of those who look different, talk different or pray in unfamiliar ways.

The consequences of these efforts are not limited to gains and losses in politics or board rooms. The consequences bear negatively upon all those who have been targeted for exclusion from "We the People" and from love of neighbor. The results of the politics of fear are a silent war at home being waged against immigrant communities and the virtually invisible toll of human suffering inflicted upon civilians caught in the crossfire of our continuing wars on terror in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and around the world. These wars abroad and at home are not two different issues; they are two sides of the same Pax Americana coin.

The Secure Communities Program, which enlists local police to identify criminal immigrants for deportation, is used by anti-immigrant police and politicians to hunt down and deport as many undocumented immigrants as possible. Of the 392,000 immigrants deported this

year only 195,000 were classified as "convicted criminal aliens." In many cases, local police arrest noncitizens for relatively minor crimes, like driving without a license. Tens of thousands of our newly arrived neighbors, whose children go to school with our children, live in justified fear that they may be taken away from their families.

Pax Christi can play a role in changing the national discourse against immigrants at home while continuing our efforts to end U.S. wars abroad by challenging the politics of fear that drives them both. How? We need to move from our comfort zones, build relationships with immigrant communities and follow their lead to building a more peaceful world. As long as immigrant communities stand alone in their struggle for justice they will remain easy fodder for racist campaigns to "take back America." Until whites and other communities of color stand in solidarity with those who are marginalized by fear and mistrust, they will be seen as foreigners making claims to rights they don't deserve.

This silent war against immigrant communities constitutes one of the most important challenges facing the anti-war movement. History will judge us on whether we were able to move beyond our predominantly White peace agenda and build an authentic anti-racist, multicultural movement for peace with justice, a movement accountable to people of color around the world and in our own towns and cities.

For ideas on how your Pax Christi group can begin building relationships with communities of color, go to www.paxchristiusa.org.

This article was written by the Pax Christi Anti-Racism Team.

The information found here is excerpted from the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services document, "Immigration Myths and Facts," updated on October 13, 2010. For full citations and more myths and facts, please contact Beth Kenyon at Beth@paxchristiusa.org, or visit the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services website directly: www.lirs.org and search for "myths and facts."

Myth: Immigrating to the United States for work or family is easy.

Fact: Even though the U.S. economy relies on millions of undocumented laborers, every year only 5,000 green cards are available for low-skilled workers. The number of visas for highly skilled workers who contribute heavily to U.S. global competitiveness is declining. Furthermore, families wait years for reunification. Spouses and minor children of green card holders wait one to two years to join family members in the United States. Siblings of U.S. citizens wait 9-19 years for visas.

Myth: Immigration leads to an increase in crime and violence.

Fact: Crime rates are lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates. From 1999 to 2006, the total crime rate declined 13.6% in the 19 highest-immigration states, compared to a 7.1% percent decline in the other 32 states. In Arizona, the state's overall crime rate dropped 12% in 2009 and between 2004 and 2008, it decreased by 23%. Research also shows that the incarceration rate for native-born men age 18-39 has been five times higher than the rate for immigrant men. Even with increased immigration, the violent crime rate in the United States has declined 34.2% and the property crime rate has fallen 26.4%. According to U.S. Census data, native born citizens are five times more likely than immigrants to be in a correctional facility or mental hospital.

Myth: Immigrants take jobs away from Americans.

Fact: Between 2000 and 2005, the availability of native-born low-wage workers declined by approximately 1.8 million. In the same period, the number of low-wage immigrant workers increased by 620,000, thus offsetting the total decline by about a third. More recently, a series of reports found that there is little apparent relationship between immigration and unemployment rates of native-born workers at the regional, state, or county

level. Reports have additionally found that, generally, immigrant labor is differentiated and complementary to native labor. As a result, in the short run, there is limited competition and in the long run, increased job opportunities may arise for native workers. Ultimately, immigrants have a positive effect on native workers – they raise average wages and lower the prices of goods and services.

Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes.

Fact: All immigrants pay taxes. Even undocumented immigrants pay sales taxes and real estate taxes (either directly as homeowners or indirectly through rent). The Social Security Administration estimates that 50-75% of unauthorized immigrants pay federal, state, and local taxes, including Medicare and \$6–7 billion in Social Security taxes that will never benefit them. In addition, an April 2010 study found that 90% of the surveyed migrants had paid taxes prior to receiving a green card.

Myth: Immigrants are a drain on the economy.

Fact: Approximately 26 million immigrants currently residing in the United States arrived after the age of 18 and are in prime working age. They represent roughly \$2.8 trillion to U.S. taxpayers, who receive the benefit of their labor without the cost of their education. One such benefit is Social Security. As a result of increased immigration, Social Security's finances have improved. Over the past two decades, immigrants have played a central role in the cycle of the economic growth of cities. Cities with thriving immigrant populations – with both high-earning and lower-wage workers – generally prospered the most. Research also shows that immigrants are 30 percent more likely than U.S.-born citizens to form new businesses and are 3 times more likely to file patents, creating jobs, increasing innovation, stimulating U.S. economic activity.

Action Suggestions

As our diverse faith traditions teach us to welcome our sisters and brothers with love and compassion— regardless of their place of birth—we invite you to call on President Obama and Congress to work together to enact humane and equitable immigration reform.

White House Comment Line: (202) 456-1111

Email Address: president@whitehouse.gov

Website: www.whitehouse.gov

Capitol Switchboard: T. (202) 234-3121

Urge them to act on the following:

- Uphold family unity as a priority of all immigration policies
- Create a process for undocumented immigrants to earn their legal status and eventual citizenship without having to serve in the U.S. military
- Protect all workers and provide efficient channels of entry for new migrant workers
- Restore due process protections and reform detention policies

Upcoming Events

Campaign for Fair Food Spring Actions: In the Spring of 2011, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and their allies will be gathering for two protests for farmworker justice:

- **Sunday, February 27th** in Quincy, Massachusetts for a protest at Ahold's U.S. headquarters.
- **Saturday, March 5th** in Tampa, Florida for a protest at Publix's headquarters.

For more information, please see the Coalition of Immokalee Workers website: www.ciw-online.org

New Year's Resolution Campaign: Join members of the Interfaith Immigration Coalition as we make it our New Year's Resolution to stand with immigrants, mobilize our faith communities, and call on Congress to make it their New Year's Resolution to enact immigration reform in 2011.

- Make your New Year's Resolution by signing a pledge card, and encourage others to join you
- Engage your community by hosting pre or post New Year's Resolution Parties for immigration reform
- Share your New Year's Resolution by submitting a short (1-2 minute) video to our new YouTube page to inspire others in their work for more welcoming communities and immigration reform

For more information: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/>

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In addition, immigrant families living in the United States, intact or otherwise, suffer the consequences of policies designed to produce deportation by attrition. By limiting access to the social safety net and the basic needs of food, shelter, education, etc., it is hoped that immigrants will just give up and go home.

People who are undocumented are barred from receiving food stamps, WIC assistance, public housing, HUD money or other government subsidies. Private agencies that accept public money to provide housing to the poor are also barred from providing shelter to anyone without papers. In addition, local legislation has been enacted in recent years making it a crime to rent to undocumented immigrants in the municipalities of Riverside, NJ; Hazelton, PA and Fremont, NE. Beginning July 29, 2010, it became a crime in Arizona to provide shelter to anyone who there is reason to believe may be undocumented.

In terms of healthcare, undocumented immigrants are barred from receiving Medicaid. They are also barred from purchasing healthcare from the soon to be created insurance exchange as a result of the recently passed healthcare reform bill. On the state level, in both New Jersey and Massachusetts, legal residents who are immigrants have been dropped from state programs that provide healthcare to families in poverty.

Education which has offered a way out of poverty for many past generations of immigrants is more difficult for the children of immigrants to access. Despite a Supreme Court decision requiring all public schools to admit students regardless of immigration status, immigrant children are regularly discriminated against in the admissions process to public schools. A survey by the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey in 2006 showed that as many as 20% of local school districts in New Jersey were either requiring proof of legal immigration status or requiring information that would reveal a student's immigration status during the enrollment process. A follow up survey in 2008 revealed that many of the districts previously found to be in violation

had not changed their policies or procedures despite written notice.

When it comes to college, undocumented students do not have access to federal grants and loans and, in all but nine states, undocumented students are forced to pay out-of-state tuition. South Carolina and Oklahoma were recently joined by Georgia in banning undocumented students from state colleges and universities all together.

This past January in New Jersey, an attempt to extend in-state tuition to all students who could prove physical residency failed to pass both houses of the legislature. This leaves in place a system by which individual institutions set their own policies regarding tuition and admission of undocumented students. One county college, the County College of Morris, completely bars the admission of students who are without papers. A bill that is currently pending in New Jersey would bar all undocumented students from public colleges and universities. It is one of about a half-dozen anti-immigrant bills that have been introduced in New Jersey following a nationwide trend.

The sad fact is that the arguments that generate these laws and policies have become so pervasive and accepted that even if the most liberal comprehensive immigration reform bill is enacted into law it will not address many of the issues created by an "enforcement-first" policy. This means our strategy for immigration reform must have a local component that engages legislators and community leaders at all levels.

As people of faith who believe in the Gospel's call to radical hospitality we must look beyond Washington, D.C. in our advocacy for immigrants. It is not enough that we oppose the totality of the injustice created by our federal immigration policy. We are also called to mitigate the suffering of individuals and families while we work and pray for systemic change.

This article was written by Kathy O'Leary. She is the Pax Christi New Jersey State Coordinator.

Legislative Updates

Legislative Updates Concerning Immigration

Immigration Reform: In October, Representative Gutierrez (D-IL) outlined principles for an immigration bill he plans to introduce later this year. The bill will provide a path to legal status for undocumented immigrants, promote effective enforcement of immigration laws, ensure protections for workers, improve the employment eligibility verification system, and create increased opportunities for immigrant families to reunite legally in the United States.

Detention: The use of detention has expanded drastically in recent years as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has escalated its immigration enforcement efforts. A number of members of Congress have introduced bills to reform the immigration detention system. Representative Roybal-Allard (D-CA) and Senator Menendez (D-NJ) have introduced the most comprehensive detention bills, H.R. 1215, S. 1549 and S. 1550, which would do the following:

- Reduce the reliance use of immigration detention for vulnerable populations who pose no risk to the community.
- Establish clear standards and criteria for releasing protected classes of immigrants from detention.
- Expand the use of bond, parole and programs that are more cost-effective, fair and humane than detention.
- Ensure enforceable standards for detention facilities used to lock up immigrants.

Protecting Immigrant Families: The current immigration system permits U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents to petition for their close family members to join them in the United States. Based on the closeness of the family relationship and whether the petitioner is a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident, waits can be as little as months or as long as 22 years. Every year the government can allocate as many as 480,000 family visas, but it cannot exceed this cap. As a result, it is estimated that there are over 4 million people waiting to receive family visas.

The Reuniting Families Act (S. 1085) would reform the family-based immigration system to end lengthy separations of loved ones, promote family stability and foster the economic growth that immigrant families have provided throughout our history. S. 1085 would:

ations of loved ones, promote family stability and foster the economic growth that immigrant families have provided throughout our history. S. 1085 would:

- Clear the lengthy visa backlogs which separate families for as long as 22 years.
- Expedite the reunification process for spouses and minor children of legal permanent residents.
- Recapture unused family visas previously allocated by Congress and allow them to be used in the future.
- Give the government authority to ameliorate hardships faced by families who might otherwise be forced apart by current immigration laws.

Workers' Rights: Our country has long been built on the labor of immigrant workers. Currently, 15% of the U.S. workforce is immigrant workers; 5% of the workforce is undocumented. These workers make positive contributions to our economy and society, but too often they are treated poorly and exploited at the workplace. Nationally, nonpayment of earned wages, unsafe and unhealthy work conditions, and poor quality jobs with no benefits are commonplace. Immigrant workers—both with and without legal status—are often unaware of their rights under U.S. law, are too afraid to complain lest they lose their jobs (and thus, in many cases, their immigration status), and have limited English proficiency that deters them from seeking recourse.

Equal rights and equal treatment under the law, the inability of employers to threaten workers with deportation, and strengthened enforcement of labor standards will promote humane treatment and allow immigrant workers to stand up for their rights. All workers benefit from the enforcement of health, safety, wage, and hour laws, as well as the right to peacefully organize.

The Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits, and Security (AgJOBS) Act is a result of a compromise between farmworker groups and growers. It will give workers a path to citizenship and improve wages and work conditions while providing a stable workforce for the agriculture industry.

Peacemaking Quote

“When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy we are paying a debt of justice.”

St. Gregory the Great

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Visit www.paxchristiusa.org
for more educational and
spiritual resources for peace.

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Embrace and use Catholic social teaching as a guide and a reminder that we are made in the image of God and are called to welcome the stranger among us, to value human life for it is sacred, and to honor the dignity of the human person for it is the foundation of a moral vision for society; appreciate that how we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.

Commit our communities of faith to provide formation on Catholic social teaching; to challenge parishioners to build community, to not judge others; to interface with the stranger among us in our local community and parish; and to create and promote parish programs aimed at supporting, protecting and empowering our immigrant sisters and brothers.

Take advantage of excellent resources that teach and provide formation on the plight of immigrants, such as the USCCB Justice for Immigrant and many secular organizations who are committed to immigration reform.

Provide space and opportunities for faith communities to meet, hear testimonies from immigrants, and to share and interface with one another to celebrate God's gift and presence at this time in our history.

Communicate, comprehend and collaborate with the immigrant community to better comprehend the nature and challenges of the poor and the communal identity all share as the one body of Christ; and promote unity and solidarity within our parishes.

Pax Christi USA calls on the Congress to:

Pass humane Immigration Reform legislation and stop partisanship and obstructionism.

Give legal status to the children of immi-

grant families so that they may continue their formal education.

Reduce the pending backlog and make more visas available for family reunification purposes.

Pass a temporary worker program that:

- paves the way to permanent residency,
- commits to family unity that immediately allows family members to join the worker,
- allows workers to change jobs,
- provides the same protections as American workers are entitled to,
- enforces the rights of workers, ensures their wages and benefits, and allows mobility between the U.S. and their homeland, as well as within the U.S.

Pass broad-based legalization for those living within our country without proper immigration documentation and restore the due process that has been eroded by the 'war on terror.'

Consider how our foreign policies have contributed to the impoverishment or instability of our hemispheric neighbors and created the migration we witness today.

“The truth is, every time you did for the least of my sisters or brothers, you did it for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Pax Christi USA takes this message to heart. In its commitment to peacemaking and in promoting a spirituality of nonviolence, PCUSA strives to be a witness to and a voice of peace with justice. Mahatma Gandhi taught us that poverty is the worse type of violence. Immigrants who are a vulnerable population who live in fear, and without due process and legal rights, are among the poorest in our society. To deny them rights and to demonize them as enemies of the state cannot be reconciled with the Good News. We are called to build community, not to judge behavior. We are called to be sisters and brothers all.

Resources:

- John Paul II, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *The Church in America*, (Washington, D.C.; USCCB, 1999)
- Pax Christi USA Anti-Racism Team, (PCUSA Erie, PA)
- Giving Facts a Fighting Chance: Answers to the Toughest Immigration Questions, (Immigration Policy Center/American Immigration Council, Washington, D.C.; October 2010)
- Justice for Immigrants: we are one family under God!, (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., 2010)
- Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, (Washington, D.C.; USCCB, 2003)