

# Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope

## *The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform*



### What do Californians think about immigration reform?

California voters support comprehensive immigration reform. In the April 2007 *Field Poll*, among registered voters:

- 67 percent support creating temporary worker programs for undocumented immigrants that would legalize their status and allow future immigrants to work in this country.
- 83 percent continue to favor creating a program allowing undocumented immigrants who have been living in the U.S. for a number of years an opportunity to stay in this country and apply for citizenship if they have a job, learn English, and pay back taxes.

## Understanding Catholic Social Teaching on Migration

### 1. People have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.

All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.

### 2. People have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.

The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.

### 3. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.

The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control territories but rejects such control when it is exerted merely for the purpose of acquiring additional wealth. More powerful economic nations, which have the ability to protect and feed their residents, have a stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows.

### 4. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.

Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.

### 5. The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected.

Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.

## ➤ The Myths are: The Facts are . . .

- **Immigrants don't pay taxes:** Immigrants pay taxes, in the form of income, property, sales, and taxes at the federal and state level. A range of studies find that immigrants pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes. Undocumented immigrants pay income taxes as well, as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers), which grew by \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998.
- **Most immigrants cross the border illegally:** Around 75 percent of today's immigrants have legal permanent (immigrant) visas; of the 25 percent that are undocumented, 40 percent overstayed temporary (non-immigrant) visas.
- **Immigrants send all their money back to their home countries:** In addition to the consumer spending of immigrant households, immigrants and their businesses contribute \$162 billion in tax revenue to U.S. federal, state, and local governments. While it is true those immigrants remit billions of dollars a year to their home countries, this is one of the most targeted and effective forms of direct foreign investment.
- **Immigrants come here to take welfare:** Immigrants come to work and reunite with family members. Immigrant labor force participation is consistently higher than native born. Immigrant workers make up a larger share of the U.S. labor force (12.4 percent) than they do the U.S. population (11.5 percent). Moreover, the ratio between immigrant use of public benefits and the amount of taxes they pay is consistently favorable to the U.S. In one estimate, immigrants earn about \$240 billion a year, pay about \$90 billion a year in taxes, and use about \$5 billion in public benefits. In another cut of the data, immigrant tax payments total \$20 to \$30 billion more than the amount of government services they use.
- **Immigrants take jobs and opportunity away from Americans:** The largest wave of immigration to the U.S. since the early 1900s coincided with our lowest national unemployment rate and fastest economic growth. Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for U.S. and foreign workers, and foreign-born students allow many U.S. graduate programs to keep their doors open.
- **Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy:** During the 1990s, half of all new workers were foreign-born, filling gaps left by native-born workers in both the high- and low-skill ends of the spectrum. Immigrants fill jobs in key sectors, start their own businesses, and contribute to a thriving economy. The net benefit of immigration to the U.S. is nearly \$10 billion annually. Some 70 percent of immigrants arrive in prime working age. That means we haven't spent a penny on their education, yet they are transplanted into our workforce and will contribute \$500 billion toward our social security system over the next 20 years.
- **Immigrants don't want to learn English or become Americans:** Within 10 years of arrival, more than 75 percent of immigrants speak English well; moreover, demand for English classes at the adult level far exceeds supply. Greater than 33 percent of immigrants are naturalized citizens; given increased immigration in the 1990s, this figure will rise as more legal permanent residents become eligible for naturalization in the coming years. The number of immigrants naturalizing spiked sharply after two events: enactment of immigration and welfare reform laws in 1996, and the terrorist attacks in 2001.
- **Today's immigrants are different than those of 100 years ago:** The percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign-born now stands at 11.5 percent. In the early 20th century it was approximately 15 percent. Similar to accusations about today's immigrants, those a century ago initially settled in mono-ethnic neighborhoods, spoke their native languages, and built up newspapers and businesses that catered to their fellow émigrés. They also experienced the same types of discrimination that immigrants face today, and integrated within American culture at a similar rate. If we view history objectively, we remember that every new wave of immigrants has been met with suspicion and doubt and yet, ultimately, every past wave of immigrants has been vindicated and saluted.
- **Weak U.S. border enforcement has led to high undocumented immigration:** From 1986 to 1998, the Border Patrol's budget increased six-fold and the number of agents stationed on our southwest border doubled to 8,500. The Border Patrol also toughened its enforcement strategy, heavily fortifying typical urban entry points and pushing migrants into dangerous desert areas, in hopes of deterring crossings. Instead, the undocumented immigrant population doubled in that timeframe, to eight million. Insufficient legal avenues for immigrants to enter the U.S., compared with the number of jobs in need of workers, have significantly contributed to this current situation.
- **The War on Terrorism can be won through immigration restrictions:** No security expert since September 11, 2001 has said that restrictive immigration measures would have prevented the terrorist attacks—instead, the key is effective use of good intelligence. Most of the 9/11 hijackers were here on legal visas. Since 9/11, the myriad of measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security have netted no terrorism prosecutions. In fact, several of these measures could have the opposite effect and actually make us less safe, as targeted communities of immigrants are afraid to come forward with information.

Find sources for this information, as well as parish resources, and opportunities for action at: [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org)