

Talking About Migration

A discussion based on *Strangers No Longer*



In 2003, the Catholic Bishops of the United States and Mexico issued the joint statement “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope” to address the humanitarian and justice issues raised by the migration of undocumented workers to the U.S. While the full text can be found at www.usccb.org, the excerpts here invite Catholics and other people of good will to discuss the Bishops’ request “to exercise their faith and to use their resources and gifts to truly welcome the stranger among us (cf. Mt 25:35).”

“As pastors to more than ninety million Mexican Catholics and sixty-five million U.S. Catholics, we witness the human consequences of migration in the life of society every day. We witness the vulnerability of our people involved in all sides of the migration phenomenon, including families devastated by the loss of loved ones who have undertaken the migration journey and children left alone when parents are removed from them. We observe the struggles of landowners and enforcement personnel who seek to preserve the common good without violating the dignity of the migrant. And we share in the concern of religious and social service providers who, without violating civil law, attempt to respond to the migrant knocking at the door.” (par. 4)

Discuss: What is your personal experience with the issue of migration? Where have you encountered it? What are your sources of information about it?

We judge ourselves as a community of faith by the way we treat the most vulnerable among us. The treatment of migrants challenges the consciences of elected officials, policymakers, enforcement officers, residents of border communities, and providers of legal aid and social services, many of whom share our Catholic faith. (par. 6)

Discuss: In this section the Bishops appeal to an ancient biblical standard for judging the fidelity of God’s people. What would this standard reveal if it were used to evaluate our local and national communities today? What would it reveal about our community of faith?

Since its founding, the United States has received immigrants from around the world who have found opportunity and safe haven in a new land. The labor, values, and beliefs of immigrants from throughout the world have transformed the United States from a loose group of colonies into one of the leading democracies in the world today. From its founding to the present, the United States remains a nation of immigrants grounded in the firm belief that newcomers offer new energy, hope, and cultural diversity. (par. 17)

Discuss: What is your own family story regarding immigration? What challenges and achievements are remembered in the retelling of your family history?



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Discuss: Below the Bishops outline five principles on migration that emerge from Catholic Social Teaching. Which one resonates most with you? Which do you find the most challenging?

Both of our episcopal conferences have echoed the rich tradition of church teachings with regard to migration. Five principles emerge from such teachings, which guide the Church's view on migration issues.

I. Persons 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.

II. Persons 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.

III. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.

The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their 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.

IV. 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.

V. 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. (par 33-38)

Discuss: Where do you see yourself in the Bishops' call to "welcome the stranger" as it is described in these excerpts? How does this call speak to you personally? What, if anything, do you feel prompted to do?

