

Catholic

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Immigration

UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC CALL

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Migrants raise their hands to bless a delegation of US bishops and Catholic Church leaders in Mexico. The pastoral visit in 2019, sponsored by various offices of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and other national organizations, aimed to highlight the Church's ministry to migrants, the border conditions, and immigration laws affecting them and their material and spiritual needs.

Long before immigrants, refugees, and migrants became the subjects of modern-day hot-button political debates, the Catholic Church addressed the question of whether people have the right to emigrate and immigrate. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “Part Three: Life in Christ, Section II: The Family and Society” refers to a “right to emigrate” (CCC 2211). It further declares, “The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him” (CCC 2241).

Additionally, Catholic social teaching on this subject acknowledges that we don’t live in a perfect world. To imply a simple solution exists in addressing all sides of the immigration crisis would be foolish and false. In a pastoral statement titled “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: United in Diversity,” the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) affirms this reality while also offering a balanced perspective on the subject:

While individuals have the right to move in search of a safe and humane life, no country is bound to accept all those who wish to resettle there....Because there seems to be no end to poverty, war, and misery in the world, developed nations will continue to experience pressure from many peoples who desire to resettle in their lands. Catholic social teaching is realistic: While people have the right to move, no country has the duty to receive so many immigrants that its social and economic life are jeopardized....For this reason, Catholics should not view the work of the federal government and its immigration control as negative or evil. Those who work to enforce our nation’s immigration laws often do so out of a sense of loyalty to the common good and compassion for poor people seeking a better life. In an ideal world, there would be no need for immigration control. The Church recognizes that this ideal world has not yet been achieved.

That statement speaks to the rights and responsibilities of the migrant as well as the institutions and social structures positioned to assist them.

In his message for the 2019 World Day of Migrants and Refugees—the theme of which was “It’s not just about migrants”—Pope Francis stated: “It is not just about migrants: it is about charity. Through works of charity, we demonstrate our faith (see James 2:18). And the highest form of charity is that shown to those unable to reciprocate and perhaps even to thank us in return.”

The Catholic View: Unity in Diversity

Generally speaking, today’s Catholic leaders and authoritative Catholic texts favor generous immigration policies, especially those for people who want to come to the most sought-after destinations of immigrants today, the United States and Western Europe. The USCCB views immigration as a call to conversion in that, as a community, we might find unity in diversity. In “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us,” the bishops declared: “The presence of brothers and sisters from different cultures should be



celebrated as a gift to the Church.” They added, “As Catholics we are called to take concrete measures to overcome the misunderstanding, ignorance, competition, and fear that stand in the way of genuinely welcoming the stranger in our midst and enjoying the communion that is our destiny as Children of God.”

Individual bishops also champion the rights of immigrants. When US officials recommended in 2019 that refugee admissions in the year 2020 be capped at fewer than 30,000, opposing the cap with a joint statement were Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, archbishop of Galveston-Houston and then-president of the USCCB, and Bishop Joe S. Vásquez, then-chair of the USCCB Committee on Migration. “Further reductions in the number of refugees allowed to seek freedom in the United States would be wholly counter to our values as a nation of immigrants,” the joint statement