

PEACE and JUSTICE

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SPOTLIGHT ON: MIGRANT WORKERS

From the Desk of a Social Justice Intern...

Think about your life here in America. Were you born in this country as an American citizen? Do your parents work at jobs that give them the respect and dignity they deserve? Has your family ever struggled to earn that money and then have to find a way to get that money back to you? These are some of the challenges that undocumented migrant workers in the United States face every day. My challenge to you is to think about scripture and how we, as Americans, can apply the words of Jesus in how we think about and treat undocumented migrant workers. In Matthew 25:35, Jesus says to His followers, "For I was a stranger and you welcomed me." I believe that as Christians, it is our duty to heed the words of Jesus. How would you feel if you were forced to leave your home for a country where the language and customs are unfamiliar just so that you could make money for your family? Every day, more and more undocumented workers must leave the comfort of their homes, escape illegally into America, work undignified jobs, and find a way to get the money they earned back to their families. Think twice before you judge these undocumented migrant workers. They, too, are human beings who deserve respect and dignity. Welcome these strangers as they struggle every day to provide for their families.

Countering Immigration Myths: Immigrants Take Away American Jobs

Many people believe that the immigrants that come into our country take away American jobs from U.S. citizens. The truth is that the jobs that these immigrants have are jobs that you and I would prefer not to work. Immigrants work in the fields that produce the food we eat and the clothes we wear. The conditions under which they work are not pristine and the wages they make are nothing close to the minimum wage that U.S. citizens make. 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. While there has been no comprehensive study done of immigrant-owned businesses, we have countless examples: in Silicon Valley, companies begun by Chinese and Indian immigrants generated more than \$19.5 billion in sales and nearly 73,000 jobs in 2000. A recent study produced by the Pew Hispanic Center reveals that "Rapid increases in the foreign-born population at the state level are not associated with negative effects on the employment of native-born workers." In fact, given that the number of native-born low wage earners is falling nationally, immigrants are playing an important role in offsetting that decline. The Urban Institute reports that between 2000 and 2005 the total number of low-wage workers declined by approximately 1.8 million while the number of unskilled immigrant workers increased by 620,000, thus offsetting the total decline by about a third.

**Immigrants take away American jobs? =
FALSE**

As Congress continues to debate ways to address illegal immigration, we must remember the many hard-working legal immigrants that contribute so much to our nation's economy and culture

~Bob Filner

Why Do People Migrate Anyway?

There are so many reasons why people migrate: war, political persecution, need for space, safety, even natural disasters. In the world today, however, a major reason for migration is the economic climate. In this day and age, many people are no longer self sufficient. Since the Industrial Revolution, fewer and fewer people grow their own food to care for themselves. Now a person needs to have the financial means to feed themselves. In many of the third world countries, this becomes increasingly more difficult. First the populations are growing, and there is not enough food to go around. Many of our modern day migrants are in the "lowest" class of society: they are poor, without homes, without education, and without jobs. They may have an education, but cannot find work due to issues of racism, political views, or the lack of jobs. They hope to come to America, the land of opportunity, and want to make a better life for their families. Of course, the U.S. has problems of its own: increased debt, high unemployment rates, and a poor economy. What is different in the U.S., however, is that migrant people believe they will at least be able to try to make a living for themselves and their families, when in their own country all doors are closed to them.

How can we help make these people's lives better in their own countries? Well let's focus on the money issue. Though young, college students are still consumers: we need clothing and food just like everyone else. Instead of just buying Maxwell House coffee, why not go the Lexington Co-op on Elmwood and buy fair trade? Buying fair trade means that the person who grew the crop is actually getting a fair price for the work put into the crop. You can show your support by being an informed consumer and thinking about what you buy!

A Prayer For Immigrants

God of the journey, God of the traveler, we pray for those who leave their homes in search of new beginnings and possibilities, may they know your presence with them. We pray that those who seek to make a home in this country may find us welcoming and willing to help them find a path toward citizenship, we pray that our legislators, as they craft new immigration legislation, may find the wisdom and courage to enact new policies that do justice for our country and for those who would immigrate here. We pray for those who fan the flames of fear and discrimination against the undocumented may be touched with your divine compassion. We pray in Jesus' name.

~Amen~



Five Principles on Migration

In 2003, the Catholic Bishops of the United States and Canada joined together to issue a statement on the migration of undocumented workers to the US, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope". These Bishops worked to create a list of five principles on migration based on the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

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 Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States are calling us to listen to the words of Jesus and "welcome the stranger." Immigrants, whether they are legal or not, are still human beings. They deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.