

CATHOLIC TEACHING ON IMMIGRATION

"...[N]oone would exchange his country for a foreign land if his own afforded him the means of living a decent and happy life." (#47)

Pope Leo XIII
Rerum Novarum 1891

"Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance." (#62)

Pope Benedict XVI
Caritas in Veritate 2009

"The migrant Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, living in exile in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil." (Intro)
Pope Pius XII, Exsul Familia Nazarethana 1952

"Solidarity... is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all." (#38)

Saint Pope John Paul II,
Sollicitudo Rei Socialis 1987

"Ideally, unnecessary migration ought to be avoided; this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development. Yet until substantial progress is made in achieving this goal, we are obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfillment." (#129)
Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti 2020

Three Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration

- First Principle: People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.
- Second Principle: A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration.
- Third Principle: A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

Learn more!



The overriding principle of all Catholic social teaching is that individuals must make economic, political, and social decisions not out of shortsighted self-interest, but with regard for the common good. That means that a moral person cannot consider only what is good for his or her own self and family, but must act with the good of all people as his or her guiding principle. The second principle of Catholic social teaching may seem to negate the first principle. However, principles one and two must be understood in the context of principle three. And all Catholic social teaching must be understood in light of the absolute equality of all people and the commitment to the common good.

Biblical Teaching on Immigration

- The Israelites' experience of living as homeless aliens was so painful that God ordered his people for all time to have special care for the alien: "You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lv 19:33-34).
- The New Testament begins with Matthew's story of Joseph and Mary's escape to Egypt with their newborn son, Jesus. Our Savior himself lived as a refugee because his own land was not safe.
- Jesus reiterates the Old Testament command to love and care for the stranger, a criterion by which we shall be judged: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me".
(Mt 25:35)



Learn more
about Catholic
Teaching on
immigration &
opportunities
to take action
here!



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Catechism of the Catholic Church

"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." *Catholic Catechism, 2241*

Teachings from the U.S. Catholic Bishops

- All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, economic security).
A Catholic Framework for Economic Life, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops
- The Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into this country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of all especially those who find themselves in desperate circumstances.
Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops
- 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.
Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops
- The call to solidarity is also a call to promote the effective recognition of the rights of immigrants and to overcome all discrimination based on race, culture, or religion. . . Catholic lay people, diocesan officials, and bishops should continue to work together with community organizations, labor unions, and other religious bodies on behalf of the rights of immigrants in the workplace, schools, public services, our legal system, and all levels of government.
Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops

A Pope's Prayer for Immigrants

Merciful God, we pray to you for all the men, women and children who have died after leaving their homelands in search of a better life.

Though many of their graves bear no name, to you each one is known, loved and cherished.

May we never forget them, but honour their sacrifice with deeds more than words.

We entrust to you all those who have made this journey, enduring fear, uncertainty and humiliation, in order to reach a place of safety and hope.

Just as you never abandoned your Son as he was brought to a safe place by Mary and Joseph, so now be close to these, your sons and daughters, through our tenderness and protection.

In caring for them may we seek a world where none are forced to leave their home and where all can live in freedom, dignity and peace.

Merciful God and Father of all, wake us from the slumber of indifference, open our eyes to their suffering, and free us from the insensitivity born of worldly comfort and self-centeredness.

Inspire us, as nations, communities and individuals, to see that those who come to our shores are our brothers and sisters.

May we share with them the blessings we have received from your hand, and recognize that together, as one human family, we are all migrants, journeying in hope to you, our true home, where every tear will be wiped away, where we will be at peace and safe in your embrace.

– by Pope Francis

Reflection Questions

- How does our faith call us to view migrants? Does it matter if they are documented or undocumented?
- Do you believe that certain immigrants have a superior right to migrate? For example, consider a refugee fleeing a war, a poor family seeking a better life, and a computer engineer seeking a better job. Whom does U.S. immigration policy favor? What should our policy be?
- Do you believe that U.S. migration policy is merciful and just? Why or why not?
- If you believe that immigration policy needs modification, what changes would you suggest?

Faith in Action Activities

- Attend Mass with an immigrant community and reflect on the experience.
- Write notes of encouragement to immigrants held in prison while waiting for their cases to be resolved.
- Hold a collection of funds or goods to support local immigration ministries.



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