

Justice for Immigrants Homily

- Principles of U.S. Bishops' Immigration Reform.
 1. Global anti-poverty efforts . So people don't feel the need to migrate for economic reasons. If developing nations have a good economy and jobs, people are more likely to stay in their country of birth. In the early 1930's rate of exit from U.S. was greater than rate of ingress because of the Great Depression. Political and economic stability leads to less migration.
 2. Emphasis on reuniting families. Keep families intact and together, better chance the children (often already U.S. citizens) will be good Christian adults.
 3. Better temporary worker program. Almost everybody comes on a temporary basis; many hope to stay, others not. Today there is often abuse on the part of employers – who hire undocumented workers for cheap labor.
 - A) Path to permanent residency which is achievable and verifiable. Don't string people along; give a reasonable time line.
 - B) Family unity which allows immediate family members to join worker (if husband and father comes on a temporary worker visa, make it easier for him to bring his wife and children).
 - C) Job portability which allows workers to change employers (same work, different employer – not the slave of a bad boss). If temporary worker can't go elsewhere, he/she is at the mercy of the boss.
 - D) Labor protections which apply to U.S. workers (we can't be fired without cause, or work overtime without pay, or not be offered benefits or holidays – give temporary workers the same protections).
 - E) Enforcement mechanisms and resources to enforce worker's rights (now where does the legal immigrant worker go with complaints of unfair treatment? Now it's open to abuse by employers).
 - F) Wages and benefits which do not undercut domestic workers (a business can pay an immigrant less and not offer benefits, that takes away jobs from U.S. workers. If business had to pay a similar wage, then U.S. workers would have a chance to get that job.)
 - G) Mobility between U.S. and homeland (make it easier to visit one's country of origin).
 - H) Labor-market test to ensure U.S. workers are not harmed. Bishops are VERY concerned about U.S. workers. Immigration reform cannot come at the expense of their jobs or rights.
 4. Broad-based legalization. “For those in the country without proper immigration documentation, opportunities should be proved for them to obtain legalization if they can demonstrate good moral character and have built up equities in this country. Such an ‘earned’ legalization should be achievable and independently verifiable.” How permanent residency

might be “earned” admits of many possibilities – definitely no felonies, pay taxes, be a productive member of society, invest in the economy, maybe even demonstrate proficiency in English.

5. Restoration of due process. No detention for months without charges, no secret hearings, no ethnic profiling, no confusion of immigration with terrorism.

- Bishops offer no more details than that.
- First objection – too many people for the country to accommodate. First, not all 11 million will qualify. Second, U.S. has precedence with slavery – abolished by 13th amendment, slaves (estimated 3.5 million slaves in 1860) became citizens when the 14th amendment was passed in 1868. Country accommodated 3.5 million new citizens overnight. U.S. bishops NOT advocating overnight citizenship, merely a process to possibly get there, and Christian treatment in the meantime.
- Second objection, our ancestors came to the U.S. legally. Actually our ancestors (my great grandparents, around 1900) came without papers and trusted the U.S. to take care of them. And the U.S. did. Immigration laws were few until post WW I.
- Third objection, illegal immigrants are criminals. Technically, most are not, because immigration law is generally not a matter of criminal law but civil law. Right now felony crimes preclude an immigrant from becoming a citizen; U.S. bishops’ comprehensive immigration reform would NOT change that.
- “Comprehensive immigration reform respects human dignity, makes communities safer and benefits all American. Help us raise a strong Catholic voice on this critical issue by calling for a just, earned legalization program. After all we are one human family under God.” Bishops Barnes and Rutilio.