

## A Journey of Hope

by T.S. Gorczyca

*“I want to encourage you and your communities to continue to welcome the immigrants who join your ranks today, to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrows and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home.”*

- Pope Benedict XVI,  
Celebration of Vespers and  
Meeting with the Bishops of the United States of America,  
April 2008

Accompanied by several hundred religious and lay, members of the MSJC Racial and Immigration Justice team had the opportunity to attend the recent 2009 Philadelphia Regional Convening on the topic of immigration reform. This was sponsored by Justice for Immigrants/USCCB [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org) at the Malvern Retreat Center in Malvern, Pa.

### Background

In January 2003, the Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico issues a joint pastoral letter entitled *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, which called for a ‘globalization of solidarity’ and an overhaul of the U.S. immigration system<sup>1</sup>.

The following year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) along with other Catholic institutions resolved to make comprehensive immigration reform – with special emphasis on legalization – a major public policy priority within the Church.

*“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

Based upon the Gospel teachings, papal encyclicals, Catholic social principles, the U.S. Bishops articulated the following five principles that govern how the church responds to public policy proposals relating to immigration:

- ❖ Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland.
- ❖ Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
- ❖ Sovereign nations have a right to control their borders.
- ❖ Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.
- ❖ The human rights and the human dignity of undocumented migrants should be respected.

### Comprehensive Immigration Reform

The Hispanic Pew Forum estimates that at least 12 million undocumented immigrants live and work in the United States today. The motivations pushing immigrants to risk unauthorized entry into America are varied, but most come with the hope of reuniting with family members already here or to find work that will provide support for their family back home.

The existing immigration system has resulted in a growing number of persons in this country in an unauthorized capacity, living in the shadows as they toil in jobs that would otherwise go unfilled.

The Church believes the current immigration laws and policies have often led to the undermining of immigrants' human dignity and have kept families apart. The Catholic bishops of the United States have been strong supporters of comprehensive immigration reform, which includes:

- ❖ Broad-based legalization (permanent residency) of the undocumented of all nationalities.
- ❖ Reform of our family-based immigration system to allow family members to reunite with loved ones in the United States.
- ❖ Reform of the employment-based immigration system to provide legal pathways for migrants to come and work in a safe, humane, and orderly manner.
- ❖ Abandonment of the border 'blockade' enforcement strategy.
- ❖ Restoration of due process protections for immigrants.
- ❖ Addressing the root causes of migration<sup>2</sup>.

Too often, discussions surrounding illegal immigration are reduced to distortions about who they are and what they want. Some say that undocumented immigrants don't pay taxes. Others say they don't want to learn English. Still others are concerned for security and want to close our borders for fear of another catastrophe like 9/11.

Well, the facts paint a different picture:

- ❖ Undocumented immigrants pay billions of dollars of sales, income and property taxes each year.
  - Undocumented workers pay as much as \$7 billion in Social Security and Medicare taxes each year.
- ❖ While first generation, non-English speaking immigrants predictably have lower rates of English proficiency than native speakers, 91% of second generation immigrants are fluent or near fluent English speakers; by the third generation, 97% speak English fluently or near fluently.

- ❖ 17 of the 19 9/11 terrorists were here in the country legally on student visas; the other two had overstayed their visas.
  - By legalizing the undocumented population and creating more visas for workers to enter legally, we better know who is in the country and who is coming, thus making us safer as a nation.

### The Current Landscape

In a recent poll, 67% of Americans are in favor of immigration reform – that is up 5% within the last couple of years<sup>3</sup>.

From a Legislative point of view:

- ❖ Approximately 45 Senators are in favor of immigration reform
  - +/- 18 of the Senators are up for grabs
- ❖ Approximately 205 Congressional Representatives are in favor of immigration reform
  - +/- 27 of the Representatives are up for grabs

An important factor in the immigration debate is where President Obama stands on the issue. He had made a promise to address immigration reform in the first year of his administration. However, given the state of the economy, the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Health Care debate, the best case scenario for a bill to be voted on is late in first quarter of 2010. Charles Schumer (NY) is taking the lead in crafting legislation in the Senate. Luis Gutierrez (IL) has been leading the charge in the House.

### Next Steps

In 2007, the last time a bill was introduced for immigration reform, it was soundly defeated. The Justice for Immigrants (JFI) campaign is seeking a different outcome this time around by:

- ❖ Educating Catholics about the challenges that immigrants face in the U.S.
- ❖ Build Support and work for the passage of a national comprehensive immigration reform policy that is consistent with the CIR principles articulated by the bishops.
- ❖ Strengthen relationships between immigrant communities and dioceses across the country.

As part of the current initiative, a post card campaign is being launched at or about Advent – a time coincident with the time when the Holy Family had to flee to Egypt for safety. These cards will be distributed to your parishes via the dioceses and collected by the JFI. When the cards are all collected a press event will be held on Capitol Hill where they will be delivered by JFI.

The Racial and Immigration Team respectfully requests your active support and involvement. In addition to the post card campaign, write your representatives

and copy your bishop – let them know how you feel. Feel free to contact Pati Krasensky ([patikras@Hotmail.com](mailto:patikras@Hotmail.com)) or Ted Gorczyca ([tsgorczyca@aol.com](mailto:tsgorczyca@aol.com)) for further information.

Won't you take a step to walk with your brother on the Journey of Hope?

<sup>1</sup> ISBN 978-1-60137-062-4, Pub. No. M7-062, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup> [www.usccb.org/mrs/mrp.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/mrp.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Appleby, Director , Office of Migration Policy and Public Affairs, USCCB