



CARDINAL'S OFFICE
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September 8, 2013

My Dear Friends in Christ:

This weekend Catholic Bishops throughout the country are addressing the topic of immigration reform in the United States. This is a major question in our public life as the Congress returns to work. The Senate has passed an immigration bill and the U.S. House of Representatives is about to debate the question.

Immigration is a theme which runs through the history of Catholicism in America. The growth of the Church in the United States during the last two centuries was driven by immigration from Ireland, Italy, Germany and Eastern Europe, as the newly arrived turned to our parishes for protection, assistance and advice. Immigrants today come in good part from Asia and Latin America, but their needs are in many ways similar to those of our ancestors.

The Church's interest in the immigration question continues to be a combination of pastoral care and public advocacy. We seek to provide a welcome in our parishes, schools and social service agencies, and also to have a place in the debate about a fair and just public policy.

The Catholic social tradition and Catholic moral teaching are rooted in the sacredness of human life, the dignity of the human person, the protection of human rights and standards of social justice by which laws and policies are shaped. Each of these ideas stands behind the Church's position on immigration reform.

We recognize that immigration policy is a complex question and that there are competing objectives at stake. The Church's position rests on the conviction that moral ideas about dignity and justice call for changes in the current policies. Archbishop Jose H. Gomez, Chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration has stated the issue with clarity: "Each day in our parishes, social service programs, hospitals and schools, we witness the human consequences of a broken immigration system.....without positive change to our immigration laws, we cannot help our brothers and sisters. Simply put, the status quo is morally unacceptable. This suffering must end."

The Catholic bishops are focusing on comprehensive immigration reform which guarantees a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented men, women and children already in the United States. The status of those people – whose lives, dignity and human rights are at stake – is the central moral issue at this moment in the policy debates.

Without comprehensive reform it will not be possible to resolve the core issue of the undocumented; partial efforts will leave too much undone. Citizenship is also essential; legal status without a path to citizenship leaves unprotected millions of people who have lived in the shadows for far too long. Comprehensive reform should also be rooted in the principle of family unification.

The Church intends to be an active participant in the immigration process. We will continue through Catholic Charities and our parishes and schools to assist new Americans as they enter our society and contribute to it, as immigrants have for centuries.

The purpose of the Church's effort across the country this weekend is to appeal to the largest single religious community in the nation: American Catholics. We invite your support; we ask you to consider carefully the case for reform. With your help the Church as a whole can help write a new chapter in the history of our nation.

Asking God's blessings upon you and all your loved ones, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Sean, OFM Cap". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Archbishop of Boston