

What does the Catholic Church say about Immigration?

Does the Catholic Church support illegal immigration?

The Catholic Bishops do not condone unlawful entry or circumventions of our nation's immigration laws. The bishops believe that reforms are necessary in order for our nation's immigration system to respond to the realities of separated families and labor demands that compel people to immigrate to the United States, whether in an authorized or unauthorized fashion.

Our nation's economy demands foreign labor, yet there are insufficient visas to meet this demand. Close family members of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents face unreasonably long separations, sometimes twenty years or longer, due to backlogs of available visas. U.S. immigration laws and policies need to be updated to reflect these realities.

Does the Catholic Church support "amnesty"?

"Amnesty," as commonly understood, implies a pardon and a reward for those who did not obey immigration laws, creating inequities for those who wait for legal entry. The Catholic Bishops support an earned legalization for those in this country in an unauthorized status, who meet reasonable requirements and are otherwise admissible. For several years, the Bishops have supported the passage of AgJOBS, federal legislation that would help farmworkers laboring in the agriculture industry. Allowing experienced workers in the fields who will remain in agriculture for another three to five years to earn legalization will help growers harvest the crops destined for our tables.

Why does the church care about immigration policies?

The Catholic Church has historically held a strong interest in immigration and how public policy affects immigrants seeking a new life in the United States. Based on Scriptural and Catholic social teachings, as well as her own experience as an immigrating Church in the United States, the Catholic Church is compelled to raise her voice on behalf of those who are marginalized and whose God-given rights are not respected.

The Church believes that current immigration laws and policies have often led to the undermining of immigrants' human dignity and have kept families apart. 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. And, our nation's border enforcement strategies have been ineffective and have led to the deaths of thousands of migrants.

The Church has a responsibility to shine the message of God on this issue and help to build bridges between all parties so that an immigration system can be created that is just for all and serves the common good, including the legitimate security concerns of our nation.

(Source: Justice for Immigrants: The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform)

"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you? [...] As you did to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

—Mt. 25:37-38, 40



7 Myths About Immigrants

MYTH #1: Immigrants don't pay taxes. Immigrants pay income, property, sales, and other taxes at the local, federal and state level. As far as income tax payments go, sources vary in their accounts, but a range of studies find that immigrants pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes. Undocumented immigrants pay income taxes as well, as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers), which grew by \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998.

(http://www.immigrationforum.org/about/articles/tax_study.htm)

MYTH #2: Immigrants come here to take welfare.

Immigrants come to work and reunite with family members. Immigrant labor force participation is consistently higher than native-born, and immigrant workers make up a larger share of the U.S. labor force (12.4%) than they do the U.S. population (11.5%). Moreover, the ratio between immigrant use of public benefits and the amount of taxes they pay is consistently favorable to the U.S. In one estimate, immigrants earn about \$240 billion a year, pay about \$90 billion a year in taxes, and use about \$5 billion in public benefits. In another cut of the data, immigrant tax payments total \$20 to \$30 billion more than the amount of government services they use.

("Questioning Immigration Policy – Can We Afford to Open Our Arms?", Friends Committee on National Legislation Document #G-606-DOM, January 25, 1996. www.fas.org/pub/gen/fcni/immigra.html)

MYTH #3: Immigrants take jobs and opportunity away from Americans. 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 created 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. (Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway, and Stephen Moore, *Immigration and Unemployment: New Evidence*, Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, Arlington, VA (Mar. 1994), p. 13)

MYTH #4: Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy. During the 1990s, half of all new workers were foreign-born, filling gaps left by native-born workers in both the high- and low-skill ends of the spectrum. Immigrants fill jobs in key sectors, start their own business, and contribute to a thriving economy. The net benefit of immigration to the U.S. is nearly

\$10 billion annually. As Alan Greenspan points out, 70% of immigrants arrive in prime working age. That means we haven't spent a penny on their education, yet they are transplanted into our workforce and will contribute \$500 billion toward our social security system over the next 20 years.

(Andrew Sum, Mykhaylo Trubskyy, Ishwar Khatiwada, et al., *Immigrant Workers in the New England Labor Market: Implications for Workforce Development Policy*, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, Prepared for the New England Regional Office, the Employment and Training Administration, and the U.S. Department of Labor, Boston, Massachusetts, October 2002. <http://www.nupr.neu.edu/1102/immigration.PDF#search=center%20for%20labor%20market%20studies%20at%20Northeastern%20University%20studies>)

MYTH #5: Immigrants don't want to learn English or become Americans. Within ten years of arrival, more than 75% of immigrants speak English well; moreover, demand for English classes at the adult level far exceeds supply. Greater than 33% of immigrants are naturalized citizens; given increased immigration in the 1990s, this figure will rise as more legal permanent residents become eligible for naturalization in the coming years. The number of immigrants naturalizing spiked sharply after two events: enactment of immigration and welfare reform laws in 1996, and the terrorist attacks in 2001.

(Simon Romero and Janet Elder, "Hispanics in the US Report Optimism" *New York Times*, Aug. 6, 2003)

MYTH #6: Most immigrants cross the border illegally.

Around 75% of today's immigrants have legal permanent (immigrant) visas; of the 25% that are undocumented, 40% overstayed temporary (non-immigrant) visas.

(Department of Homeland Security, <http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/index.htm>)

MYTH #7: Weak U.S. border enforcement has led to high undocumented immigration. From 1986 to 1998, the Border Patrol's budget increased six-fold and the number of agents stationed on our southwest border doubled to 8,500. The Border Patrol also toughened its enforcement strategy, heavily fortifying typical urban entry points and pushing migrants into dangerous desert areas, in hopes of deterring crossings. Instead, the undocumented immigrant population doubled in that timeframe, to 8 million- despite the legalization of nearly 3 million immigrants after the enactment of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986. An insufficient legal avenue for immigrants to enter the U.S., compared with the number of jobs in need of workers, has significantly contributed to this current conundrum.

(Immigration and Naturalization: http://www.ncjrs.org/ondcppubs/publications/enforce/border/ins_3.html)

(Source: Justice for Immigrants: The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform)