

CATHOLIC TEACHING ON IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

MIGRATION

The Church's position on migration is rooted in the Gospel and in the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching. A recent example of this teaching is in [Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#), a joint pastoral letter concerning migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States. The pastoral letter promotes five principles that should be used to help formulate migration-related policy:

Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland. All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.

Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families. The Church recognizes that all the goods of the Earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.

Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders. The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their territories and their borders. However, wealthier nations, which have the ability to better protect and feed their residents, have a strong obligation to accommodate migration flows.

Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection. Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.

The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected. Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment by enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. The Church recognizes the right of every sovereign state to control its borders in order to promote the common good. It also recognizes the right of every human being to migrate in order to enjoy his or her God-given rights. These teachings complement each other. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.

REFUGEES

It is a core Catholic teaching that every human being is created in the image of God and is therefore entitled to dignity and respect. The Catholic Church views assisting those in need as a fundamental Christian duty that is derived directly from the life and mercy of Christ, who himself was a refugee. As Christians, we are called to welcome our new neighbors with the same love and compassion we would want ourselves to be shown in a time of persecution. We must remember that refugees from all over the world are sent to our communities and are fleeing danger, exploitation and persecution.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) is one of nine national refugee resettlement agencies in the United States that assists refugees and advocates for the refugee community. Through a cooperative agreement and grants with the federal government, USCCB/MRS works in coordination with Catholic Charities and other partner agencies around the United States to welcome and ensure that the basic needs of each arriving refugee are adequately met.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A REFUGEE AND AN IMMIGRANT?

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group.

An immigrant is someone who voluntarily leaves his or her country in order to improve the prospects for themselves and their families.