



## Position Statement on Immigration

Recommendations by the Voice of the Poor Committee  
Council of the United States

### Message From Our President

Dear Brother and Sister Vincentians,

*I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*

We Vincentians model our lives and our service after the gospel, especially Matthew 25, which calls us to see Jesus in the poor and needy. This position paper urges us to respond enthusiastically to our brothers and sisters who are new in our community. I am grateful to the Council of the United States Voice of the Poor Committee for challenging us to be attentive to the needs and rights of immigrants.

Let us open our hearts, our minds and our hands to all who come from other countries so that they will be strangers no longer. May God bless us in these efforts and continue this good work that God has begun in us. At the last judgment may God say to us, Vincentians, when I was a stranger, you welcomed me.”

Your brother in Blessed Frédéric,

Eugene B. Smith  
National President, Council of the United States

### **Situation**

Vincentians are frequently in contact with individuals and families who have relocated to the United States. Many newcomers seek out the Society of St. Vincent de Paul meal sites, stores, and food pantries. We in turn visit their homes and provide assistance and support. Members of the Society have the opportunity to come to know the difficult circumstances in which many live. We learn how they are taken advantage of by others who are not sympathetic to the situations in which they find themselves.

In recent years thousands of people have immigrated to the United States from other countries. Many enter without authorization. For example, the U.S. and Mexican Bishops in “Stranger No Longer,” say an estimated 150,000 Mexican migrants enter the United States annually without authorization to work in agriculture, service, entertainment and construction. They labor with the quiet acquiescence of the government and of a variety of employers.

Some refer to immigrants as “illegals” while others use the label “undocumented.” Regardless of the name given: All are children of God. As Catholics we know that the human dignity of every person regardless of legal status must be preserved. We also know that any policy adopted to address the situation of

newcomers, whether identified as refugees, undocumented aliens, or legal residents newly residing in the US, must be mindful of the common good.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is an International organization with more than 90% of its membership outside the United States. It is a Catholic lay organization, and as such, it is appropriate that the Society take a position concerning immigration.

The Voice of the Poor Committee encourages all to speak on behalf of people who come to this country, whether they are here legally or are undocumented. As Christians we are called to see Christ in all people.

### **Recommendation**

At the very outset we begin with the basic proposition of:

- Urging that efforts be made to create the possibility for people to live in their own lands in security and with sufficient resources for their basic human needs.
- Urging our members and reminding all political leaders to work for justice, particularly as it relates to those uprooted from their homes by violence or dire economic need.
- Recognizing that people should have the right not to emigrate but rather to live in peace and dignity in their own lands.

## **Immigration Policies Need to Reflect Guiding Principles of Church and Country**

Thousands of people seek entry into the United States each year. For these it is our position that the immigration policy of the United States must strive to make migration safe, legal, and orderly. Our policy needs to reflect the realities of the world, restore the rule of law, reward hard working immigrants, respect U.S. workers, recognize the legitimate needs of U.S. employers, reunite families in a timely fashion, renew citizenship and assimilation as the cornerstones of our success as a nation, and rebuild public confidence in the safety, security, and orderliness of our immigration policies.

The Voice of the Poor Committee recommends that the Society of St. Vincent de Paul support the following policies.

- ⇒ Establish legal procedures that will allow undocumented immigrants and their families already established in the U.S. to come forward, obtain work and travel permits, and begin the process of becoming permanent residents and citizens.
- ⇒ Provide more flexibility in the worker visa programs that will allow replacing the present current unauthorized flow of immigrants with a legal flow of needed workers. This should be done in a way that enforces effective worker protection and provides a path to eventual citizenship for those who wish it.
- ⇒ Reform the U.S. employment-based immigration system to feature both permanent and, with appropriate protections, temporary visa programs for laborers.
- ⇒ Reduce the backlogs for close family members waiting to be reunited. This should be done in a way that will remove the incentive for loved ones to enter the U.S. illegally in order to be together. The current amalgamation of immigration laws, policies, and actions often impedes family unity.
- ⇒ Create realistic admission limits so that our laws are more amenable to effective enforcement by designing and implementing multi-level “smart border” strategies in which sending, transit, and receiving nations share intelligence and cooperate on screening and inspections. This should be designed to deter the dangerous, admit the desirable, better regulate the flow of people, and stop criminal smugglers and unscrupulous employers.

In brief the immigration policies of the U.S. should be based upon the following guiding principles:

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

(Reference: "Strangers No Longer, Together on the Journey of Hope", A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States, January, 2003. Nos. 33-38.)

We recommend that members of the Society support two legislative proposals that meet these principles.

- a. The DREAM ACT, Senate Bill 1545. It provides that aliens who have been in this country for at least five years, and were under the age of sixteen when entering the United States, and meet certain defined educational requirements be eligible to have their status adjusted to lawfully admitted for permanent residence.
- b. The UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILD PROTECTION ACT, Senate Bill 1129, which directs that the care of unaccompanied minors be with the Office of Refugee Resettlement or the Directorate of Border and Transportation Security. The purpose of the bill is to protect minors from being incarcerated with criminal offenders.

**The Declaration of Independence of the United States** reads, in part:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Our country’s Declaration speaks of the right of all, not just those who are citizens of the United States. The immigration policy of the U.S. ought reflect these beliefs.

## **The Catholic Church and Immigration**

Pope John Paul II calls the Church in America to be a “vigilant advocate” with attention to the “rights of migrants and their families, and the respect for their human dignity.” Pope John Paul II writes the following in “**Ecclesia in America**” (January 22, 1999):

65. In its history, America has experienced many immigrations, as waves of men and women came to its various regions in the hope of a better future. The phenomenon continues even today, especially with many people and families from Latin American countries who have moved to the northern parts of the continent, to the point where in some cases they constitute a substantial part of the population. They often bring with them a cultural and religious heritage which is rich in Christian elements. The Church is well aware of the problems created by this situation and is committed to spare no effort in developing her own pastoral strategy among these immigrant people, in order to help them settle in their new land and to foster a welcoming attitude among the local population, in the belief that a mutual openness will bring enrichment to all.

Church communities will not fail to see in this phenomenon a specific call to live an evangelical fraternity and at the same time a summons to strengthen their own religious spirit with a view to a more penetrating evangelization. With this in mind, the Synod Fathers recalled that “the Church in America must be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another. Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration”. (236)

Migrants should be met with a hospitable and welcoming attitude which can encourage them to become part of the Church’s life, always with due regard for their freedom and their specific cultural identity. Cooperation between the dioceses from which they come and those in which they settle, also through specific pastoral structures provided for in the legislation and praxis of the Church, (237) has proved extremely beneficial to this end. In this way the most adequate and complete pastoral care possible can be ensured. The Church in America must be constantly concerned to provide for the effective evangelization of those recent arrivals who do not yet know Christ. (238)

### **Ten Foundational Principles in the Social Teaching of the Church**

Fr. Robert P. Maloney, C.M. describes 10 essential building blocks of the Church. These include:

1. **Dignity of the Human Person.** “Every human being is created in the image of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, and therefore is invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family.”
2. **Respect for Human Life.** “Every person, from the moment of conception to natural death, has inherent dignity and a right to life consistent with that dignity.”
3. **Principal of Association.** “Our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society in economics and politics, in law and policy, directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.”
4. **Principal of Participation.** “We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.”
5. **Preferential Protection of the Poor and Vulnerable.** “We believe that we touch Christ when we touch the needy.”
6. **Principal of Solidarity.** “Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family....Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that ‘loving our neighbor’ has global dimensions in an interdependent world.”
7. **Principal of Stewardship.** “The Catholic tradition insists that we show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation.”
8. **Principal of Human Equality.** “Equality of all persons comes from their essential dignity...While differences in talents are a part of God’s plan, social and cultural discrimination in fundamental rights...are not compatible with God’s design.”
9. **Principal of the Common Good.** “The common good is understood as the social conditions that allow people to reach their full human potential and to realize their human dignity.”
10. **Principal of Subsidiarity.** “ This Principle deals chiefly with the ‘responsibilities and limits of government and the essential roles of voluntary associations.”

Rev. Maloney’s full article is found on line at: <http://www.cm-ngo.net/TenFoundationalPrinciples.html>

(Please see the article’s reference section for sources to the quotes above.)



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## **10 Points for Economic Life by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops**

1. The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.
2. All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, and serve the common good.
3. A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.
4. **All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, economic security.)**
5. All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as to organize and join unions or other associations.
6. All people, to the extent they are able, have a corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.
7. **In economic life, free markets have both clear advantages and limits; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; voluntary groups have irreplaceable roles, but cannot substitute for the proper working of the market and the just policies of the state.**
8. Society has a moral obligation, including governmental action where necessary, to assure opportunity, meet basic human needs, and pursue justice in economic life.
9. Workers, owners, managers, stockholders and consumers are moral agents in economic life. By our choices, initiative, creativity and investment, we enhance or diminish economic opportunity, community life, and social justice.
10. **The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid and development should protect human life and promote human rights, especially for those most in need wherever they might live on this globe.**