

# CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE Immigrants in the U.S. Today



In advocating on behalf of migrants, immigrants, and refugees, it is important for us to understand that the current, Catholic social justice position is based on Catholic social teaching, which is derived from the Gospels and the words of Christ; statements and encyclicals of our Popes; and statements and pastoral letters of Bishops around the world. We are continually challenged to welcome the stranger into our midst, as we would welcome Christ Himself; for in the face of the migrant, immigrant, and refugee, we must also see the face of Christ.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that people who enter a nation without proper authorization or who over-stay their visas, should be treated with respect and dignity. They should not be detained in deplorable conditions for lengthy periods of time, shackled by their feet and hands, or abuse in any manner. They should be afforded due process of the law and, if applicable, allowed to articulate a fear of return to their home before a qualified adjudicator. They should not be blamed for the social ills of a nation.

Emotions and tempers are high among many in the U.S. today regarding the subject of undocumented (or *illegal*) immigrants or migrants—including the recent passage of legislation in the State of Arizona. The arguments run across the scale about how these undocumented people create untold costs to American society. However, seldom is it mentioned that current studies also show that unauthorized immigrants provide a net gain of \$7 billion to the Social Security system each year. Using acquired social security numbers for employment (many in jobs that Americans outright refuse), the Social Security Administration also credits these workers for paying an additional \$520 billion under mismatching social security numbers—from which they will never garner unemployment or disability benefits from.

Immigrants and migrants are consumers also, which increase demand for the goods and services of U.S. industries, which helps to stimulate the U.S. economy. There are also untrue myths about immigration such as: Immigrants increase the crime rate or don't pay taxes; that the Catholic Church supports illegal immigration and "open borders"; immigrants drain the U.S. economy or are a burden on the healthcare system. The Catholic Church does not support law breaking or open borders—but it does promote the utmost maintenance of dignity and respect of the human person. In fact, over the past few years, the U.S. bishops have consistently called for significant reforms in the current U.S. immigration laws and program.

In closing, the purpose of this brief informational bulletin is to provide some needed "counter" facts and figures to help us weigh against/with a lot of the media hype and biased anti-immigrant data.