



Clarifications on Immigration Reform

Statement #1: The system is fine the way it is. I don't see why we need to support reform.

Some Catholics think reform is unnecessary and consider the immigration crisis a matter of enforcing the laws in existence. Such a position ignores important facts about immigration law in the past and the present, and also fails to note that enforcement is a part of the reform desired.

- 1) The immigration laws of the U.S. are relatively young. There were no laws until the 1870's, and those were aimed at curbing immigration from Asia. It was not until the 1920's that quotas started to be applied to immigrants from Europe. Significant immigration laws didn't begin until the 1960s. Our laws have not been in place for too long; they have been significantly reformed only two times (1986, 1996). It is prudent to reform as the world changes.
- 2) The immigration laws that exist now are not being enforced by the U.S. government. Despite the 1986 immigration reform, for example, employers are getting away with hiring illegal laborers. In the process they often exploit workers. Also, legal immigrants who overstay their visas are not kept track of well. Greater enforcement is needed for the laws that currently exist. Part of reform means removing obstacles to enforcement.
- 3) Demographic and economic changes occur often. Our immigration laws do not match the needs or reality of the U.S. economy. Currently hundreds of thousands of low skilled and seasonal workers come illegally. American businesses count on them. However, the numbers of visas available for them do not exist. This is also the case for high-skill worker visas for labor in engineering, science and medicine. The numbers of visas simply do not match the demand from U.S. businesses.
- 4) The immigration laws that are being enforced are overly burdensome. As Catholics we believe that the family is the fundamental cell of society and that marriage is sacred. However, the current laws break up families. Yes, an illegal immigrant should be punished for breaking the law. To cut a man off from his family is too severe a punishment. We should consider what the appropriate levels of punishment are.

So why support reform? Our system is seriously broken and, as a result, there are a number of injustices which exist. We have a moral obligation to address those injustices, and to try to bring about the common good by providing for the needs of the American people while showing compassion to the poor who come to our nation to survive. Reform is crucial to meet all these realities. Regardless of which party is responsible, reform needs to take place as soon as possible. Doing nothing is neither prudent nor just nor charitable.