



Immigration: How My Personal Journey Has Helped Me Understand the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church

By Giovanni Madriz

Opinions about immigration are not hard to find these days. The fact that they range from advocating complete leniency to enforcing the strictest forms of control and penalizations should come as no surprise; everybody has something to say about a subject with such profound repercussions for the society in which we live.

I find it very worrisome that, even among Catholics, opinions on the subject vary so widely. At times I can't help but wonder if some individuals have ever paused to reflect upon the social teachings of the Catholic Church. From biblical times a blueprint was given to the people of God with instructions on how foreigners are to be treated. (Leviticus 19:34)

New Testament writers visit this thorny subject more than once, hence making it clear for future generations that the teachings on how to treat foreigners are not just "old-covenant" regulations no longer to be enforced. The Gospel of Saint Matthew tells us how Jesus spent the first years of His life as a refugee, His own land not safe for Him under King Herod's rule and rage. In the same Gospel we find the Lord providing a compelling description of the Last Judgment. When describing to His disciples how we are to be divided in two groups, He discloses some of the criteria to be used for this re-grouping. The issue at hand comes up again: "For... I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35)

I was born and raised in Costa Rica. Throughout the tumultuous 1970s and 1980s we were blessed as the country managed to remain an oasis of peace and stability among nations then plagued by military dictatorships and endless civil wars. In those days not everyone fleeing Central America came to the U.S.; thou-

sands of undocumented immigrants flooded Costa Rica in an attempt to better their lives and the lives of their left-behind family members.

I must admit I grew up with a very conservative and critical attitude regarding undocumented immigrants in my homeland. There are some basic principles that synthesize the Church's position on immigration: the right to migrate in order to sustain your life and the lives of your family members, a country's right of sovereignty, the exercise of justice and mercy when regulating international borders. I could not understand how these principles could interact to justify the massive arrival of undocumented immigrants my country was experiencing. In my opinion it was a matter of better securing our borders and strict enforcement of the laws. I was not impressed by the stories of those who risked their lives and walked for days across the jungle to reach my side of the border just because things were better on my side.

It took over two decades for me to finally understand the issue. By then I had become an immigrant of several years in the U.S. The answer came to me in the most unexpected way. For the very first time my young daughter was sick. My wife and I were given a prescription and without much thought I just had to follow three simple steps: go to the store, pay for the medicine and get back home. All of a sudden the most frightening thought occurred to me: What if I didn't have a job, or money to buy the medicine? What if the stores were empty and no medicines were available even for those with money? To my mind came all those stories about people crossing international bor-



The Holy Family during their flight to Egypt.

ders to find jobs, to earn money to support their families, to help sick children enjoy a better quality of life. Would I be willing to carry a sick child for days across the rain forest if I knew there were medicines on the other side? Would I be willing to risk my life across a desert if my kids were starving or my family was being persecuted? Would I?

With teary eyes I realized there was only one Christian way of answering these questions. In an ideal world no one should have to flee their homeland to seek a better life; until we make this an ideal world, let's pray that justice and mercy guide us in our approach to immigration.

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Catholic Resources on Immigration

Justice for Immigrants: The national Catholic campaign for immigration reform established jointly by the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration and the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC). Contact: Justice for Immigrants, 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington, DC 20017; 202-541-3174; jfi@uscgb.org; www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

The Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services: This service within the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) carries out the commitment of the bishops to serve and advocate for refugees, asylees, forced migrants, immigrants, and other people on the move. Special concern is given to the most vulnerable, such as minors unaccompanied by parents or adult guardians and the victims of human trafficking. Contact: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 3211 Fourth St. NE, Washington DC 20017; 202-541-3352; www.usccb.org.

Catholic Legal Assistance Ministry (CLAM): CLAM offers representation for families who do not have the resources to hire an attorney and offers services for immigrant populations who face challenges in filing governmental documents. Contact: Kristine Walentik (314-977-2619); Hannah Willmann (314-977-7282); Catholic Legal Assistance Ministry (CLAM), 321 N. Spring, St. Louis, MO 63108; 314-977-3993.

Pastoral Migratoria Ministry: Archdiocese

of St. Louis Office of Hispanic Ministry: This office coordinates the Religious For Immigration Reform (RFIR) program, reaches out to immigrants in the different faith communities through prayer, advocacy and pastoral care. Sr. Rose Espinos, SSND, roseespinos@archstl.org; 314-792-7177.

Refugee and Immigration Services for Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri: Contact: Lorna Tran, Director, P.O. Box 2183, Jefferson City, MO 65102; 573-632-0017; LTran@ccnmo.org.

Archdiocese of St. Louis: F. Javier Orozco, Director of Hispanic Ministry for the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Contact: 20 Archbishop May Drive, St. Louis, MO 63119; 314-792-7890 or cell: 314-608-5546; javierorozco@archstl.org.

Diocese of Jefferson City: Enrique Castro, Director of Hispanic Ministry for the Diocese of Jefferson City. Contact: 2207 West Main St., P.O. Box 104900, Jefferson City, MO 65101; 573-635-9127 ext. 250; ecastro@diojeffc.org.

Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph: Gustavo Valdez, Director of Hispanic Ministry for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. Contact: P.O. Box 419037, Kansas City, MO 64141-6037; 816-756-1850 ext. 241 or 816-714-2323; valdez@diocesekcsj.org.

Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau: Milagros Calvetti, Director of Hispanic Ministry for the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. Contact: 601 S. Jefferson Avenue Springfield, MO 65806-3134; 417-866-0841 or cell 417-840-9358; mcalvetti@dioscg.org.

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When you join the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) Citizens' Network you get regular updates on a broad array of issues of concern to Catholics.

Register online at www.MOcatholic.org.

Current legislative priorities include, but are not limited to:

- Promote the sanctity of human life at all stages
- Defend religious liberty
- Uphold the rights of parents to direct their children's education
- Advocate economic justice for all, especially the poor and most vulnerable
- Urge reform to Missouri's criminal justice system

Immigration Facts for Missouri

• In 2010, Missouri had slightly over 232,000 immigrants in the state (about 3.9% of the population). The largest group of immigrants came from Asia, the next largest group came from Mexico and Central America.

• In 2010, it was estimated that in Missouri, approximately 55,000 immigrants were unauthorized, ranking Missouri as one of the states with the lowest percentage of unauthorized immigrants (41st out of 50). However, the trend is that unauthorized immigration is increasing in the state.

• Immigrants in general are concentrated in Kansas City, St. Louis and Columbia. Immigrants from Mexico and Central America are concentrated in southwestern counties and urban areas.

• There is a diversity of immigrant occupations and industries in Missouri including highly skilled jobs of physician and computer software developers. Immigrants from Mexico and Central America are mostly employed as cooks, food prep workers, machine operators,

gardeners and construction laborers.

• Immigration is directly responsible for approximately 4% of the Missouri economy. For every dollar of value added by Missouri immigrants, an additional \$1.05 of value added is created in the Missouri economy.

• In Missouri, immigrants pay \$3,073 and natives pay \$3,194 a year in per capita state and local taxes.

• Even unauthorized immigrants pay indirectly for the state services they use with the tax revenue their jobs generate.

• Missouri immigrants not born in Mexico or Central America are more affluent with more education than native Missourians.

Source: *Economic and Fiscal Contributions of International Immigrants in the State of Missouri*, Dr. Peter Easton, University of Missouri - Kansas City (UMKC) Center for Economic Information, 2013.

Immigration - The Personalistic Approach

By Gustavo Valdez

The issue of immigration is not merely a contemporary topic. If we go back in history, especially in sacred Scripture, we can find stories of immigrants that in many ways shaped salvation history. In the Old Testament, Jacob's sons — known as the fathers of the Twelve Tribes of Israel — went to Egypt looking for food mainly for two reasons: in order to obey their father's will and to avoid poverty. (Genesis 41:57; 42:1-2; 43:1-2) In the New Testament, Mary and Joseph also, for similar reasons, as in avoiding death, injustice, and obeying God's will, fled to Egypt and lived there for a few years. (Matthew 2:13)

Nowadays, the issue of immigration is evaluated from the political, sociological, and economical spheres. Everyday we hear from various social media that immigrants cause a political impact during elections, an economic harm to this country, or a social dysfunction due to the cultural differences.

These different approaches could be right or wrong; however, we as people of faith are called to have a Catholic and a higher understanding of the situation. Immigrants shouldn't be seen only as objects of development or use, but as subjects in search of happiness like any other human person created in the image and likeness of God. (Genesis 1:26) The Catholic approach is focused on the person himself and in the benefits that they can provide to society. "In most cases immigrants fill a labor need which would

otherwise remain unfilled in sectors and territories where the local workforce is insufficient or unwilling to engage in the work in question." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* 298)

The teaching of the Church helps us to look at the issue of immigration from the personalistic approach which in turn helps us to see and receive the immigrant as a human person who needs to be helped himself and his family because they, in some ways, need to become part of society. (CSDC 298) Therefore, if we see an immigrant as a human person instead of as a profitable object, then "Immigration can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it." (CSDC 297)

A country that receives an immigrant community is a country with new opportunities and hope. However, these new opportunities need to be protected by preventing "the spread of the temptation to exploit foreign laborers, denying them the same rights enjoyed by nationals, rights that are to be guaranteed to all without discrimination." (CSDC 298) For this reason, in this country, it is necessary to create a new immigration system which guarantees the recognition of the human dignity of all, the immigrant and the citizen.

The Church always, on behalf of the protection of the human dignity of the immigrants, does not hesitate to raise her voice. An example of this pastoral effort is constantly given by our Ordinaries, such as Bishop

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Robert W. Finn, among others, in his *Message for Immigration Awareness Week*, January 4-11, 2009, where he emphasized three human rights that have their origin in the principle of the universal common good (CSDC 1640): "The right of a family to sustenance, the priority of the family over the state, and the right of economic initiative." With the issue of immigration, even though it has many perspectives that may be right or wrong, it is important that we as Catholics, who are called to rise above the economic, social or political views and opinions, take to a higher and more personalistic perspective of the immigrant, who was not only created in the image of God, but is a gift to this country.

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St. Charles Borromeo's annual celebration of Cinco de Mayo. Cinco de Mayo/May 5th, celebrates the defeat of the French Army in Mexico on May 5, 1862. The church community came together in 2012 to raise money for their mission trip to Tijuana, Mexico by sharing authentic food, music, and dance. The church is located in St. Charles.





From left, Senators John McCain, Chuck Schumer, Dick Durbin, Bob Menendez and Marco Rubio listen during a news conference on comprehensive immigration reform on Capitol Hill in Washington on January 28, 2013.

Catholic Bishops' Elements of Comprehensive Immigration Reform

The U.S. Catholic bishops support enactment of comprehensive immigration reform that contains the following key elements:

- A path to citizenship that gives deserving migrants who are currently in the United States in undocumented status an opportunity to earn legal permanent residency and eventual citizenship;
- A new worker visa program for unskilled workers that allows migrants to enter the U.S. legally and safely and protects the labor rights of both U.S. and foreign workers;
- Reform of our family-based immigration system to reduce waiting times for family reunification, based on the union of a husband and a wife and their children;
- Restoration of due process protections for immigrants, including asylum-seekers;
- Policies that address the root causes of migration, such as the lack of sustainable development in sending nations; and
- Legal remedies for special populations, such as refugees, asylum seekers, trafficking victims, and children.

Will Congress Finally Act on Immigration Reform?

For years Congress has debated updating the nation's immigration laws without taking any final action. As this *MCC Messenger* goes to press, however, it appears our federal lawmakers may be ready to act.

Last month, a bipartisan group of Senators, announced a framework for immigration reform. Senators involved in developing the new consensus include: Marco Rubio of Florida, Jeff Flake of Arizona, Chuck Schumer of New York, Dick Durbin of Illinois, Bob Menendez of New Jersey, Michael Bennet of Colorado, John McCain of Arizona, and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

The broad principles involved in the framework include the following:

- A "tough but fair path to citizenship" for undocumented immigrants already in the United States;
- A process to offer green cards (legal residence) to foreign science, math and engineering graduates of Ph.D. or Master's programs;
- Revamping the guest worker program for farm workers;
- Creating a fast track to U.S. citizenship for people brought into this country as children; and,
- Additional funds for border enforcement and the establishment of a border commission composed of officials from border-states.

Speaking on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Jose' H. Gomez of Los Angeles, chairman of the bishops committee on migration, welcomed the principles set forth by the Senators and urged prompt action on immigration reform. "It is vital that the framework include a path to citizenship, so that undocumented immigrants can come out of the shadows and into the light and have a chance to become Americans," the Archbishop said.

Urge Federal Lawmakers to Support Immigration Reform

The Missouri Catholic Conference is urging Catholics to contact their two U.S. Senators and their Congressperson and call for immigration reform. At the website of Justice for Immigrants you can easily send an email. Visit www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

Here is the message that will be sent:

"Dear (Senator or Congressperson),
I agree with the U.S. Catholic bishops that now is the time to pass just and compassionate immigration reform. I ask that in the 113th Congress you support immigration reform that:

- Provides a path to citizenship for undocumented persons in the country;
- Preserves family unity as a corner-stone of our national immigration system;
- Provides legal paths for low-skilled immigrant workers to come and work in the United States;
- Restores due process protections to our immigration enforcement policies;
- Addresses the root causes (push factors) of migration, such as persecution and economic disparity.

I look forward to monitoring your public position on this vital issue to our nation. Our nation can no longer wait."