

# IMMIGRATION

## The Position of the National Council of the United States, Society of St. Vincent de Paul

### A Message From Our President

Modeling our lives and service after the teaching of the Gospel which calls us to see Jesus in the poor and needy wherever they may be found, we serve many immigrants. In the Old Testament, God told Moses, "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God." (Leviticus 19:33-34)

This position paper addresses the urgent need for Immigration Reform. Repeated attempts under both Democratic and Republican administrations at legislative and administrative reform of the immigration system in the United States have failed. Reform is overdue. Our existing patchwork of ineffective rules, administrative responses, services and legal processes has caused millions of undocumented immigrants already in the United States to suffer needless, grinding poverty and fear. Many remain in the shadows, vulnerable to exploitation and injustice, separated from their families, and deprived of basic human dignity. This situation is an affront to the American people's sense of compassion and justice and contrary to established worldwide agreements.

Our position is based on love of neighbor, the principles of our Catholic faith, and the rich tradition and noble history of our country as a land of opportunity and refuge for migrants. Jesus encouraged the Jews to see the Samaritan as a good neighbor who showed compassion even though the beaten man was a stranger. (*Luke 10: 25-37*) So too should we show compassion to those who suffer while the appropriate solutions are found to address immigration reform. Those are the tenets which should guide our public policy on this important matter, with no concessions to politics and ideology.

As Vincentians, we are called not only to serve but also to advocate for just solutions, ensuring the dignity of our immigrant brothers and sisters while acknowledging the second principle of Catholic Social Teaching which states that a country has a right to regulate its borders and to control immigration. This is not a political issue; it is a human one. We urge all Vincentians to educate themselves, engage in dialogue, and take action—whether by offering direct aid, supporting legislative efforts aligned with Catholic Social Teaching, or raising awareness in our communities. In doing so, we live out our Vincentian charism and fulfill Christ's call to love and serve all people.

Yours in Christ,  
John Berry  
National President

### Living the Social Gospel of Immigration

Just as on the road to Emmaus, Christ's disciples met him in the guise of a stranger (Luke 24:13-35), Christ makes himself present to each of us in the traveler, the newcomer, and the immigrant. As Catholics, we are inspired by the rich body of Church teaching, rooted in Biblical tradition, and we recognize our moral obligation to "Welcome the Stranger", as we would welcome Christ himself. Vincentians open their hearts and provide assistance, welcoming and accepting the immigrant, who is far away from home and in a vulnerable situation.

For years, in cooperation with the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Society has taken every opportunity to ask Congress to implement Comprehensive Immigration Reform to replace the current outdated system, which does not meet the economic needs of our country, nor the needs of the people migrating.

With our voices, we represent the immigrant families who have no voice. Immigration is, first, a moral issue, and then an economic or political issue.

In the Mediterranean Sea off the island of Lampedusa, two shipwreck tragedies in October 2013 resulted in the death of about 400 migrants fleeing North Africa to Europe for safety and opportunity. Six months later on April 1, 2014, at a Mass on the Mexico/US Border for migrants on this continent, [Cardinal Sean O'Malley's homily](#) quoted the preaching of Pope Francis at Lampedusa about the "...globalization of indifference... We have lost a sense of responsibility for our brothers and sisters. We have fallen into the hypocrisy of the Priest and Levite whom Jesus described in the parable of the Good Samaritan: we see our brother half dead on the side of the road and perhaps we say to ourselves, 'Poor soul' and then go our way. It is not our responsibility, and with that we feel reassured, assuaged. The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people."



## The Society of St. Vincent de Paul Supports Common Sense Immigration Policies that Reflect Guiding Principles of our Faith and of our Country

### THE SOCIETY SUPPORTS IMMIGRATION REFORM LEGISLATION THAT:

- **Provides a compassionate and dignified path to citizenship for undocumented persons in the country**

For this reason, Catholics should recognize that the work of the federal government in immigration enforcement is not inherently negative or unjust. Those who carry out these duties often do so with a sense of responsibility to the common good and compassion for those seeking a better life. In an ideal world, migration would be driven solely by opportunity rather than necessity. The Church acknowledges that this ideal has not yet been fully realized.

“For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me, I needed clothes, and you clothed me. ...” (Matthew 25:35-36)

- **Preserves family unity as a fundamental cornerstone of our national immigration system**

“The institution of the family is deeply rooted in this nation and receives constitutional protection. Promoting family stability, moreover, remains a modern goal, as evidenced by current federal law and modern empirical research. Family stability is a goal shared by many, including the Catholic Church, which views families as the building blocks of society and recognizes the special need that immigrants have for their families.” ([U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Amicus Brief in the case of Arizona v. United States; p. 7 – March 26, 2012](#))

- **Provides a legal path for low-skilled immigrants to come and work in the United States**

“The reality is that our current system is immoral. While many may condemn the presence of the undocumented in our land, we willingly accept their hard labor, their contributions to our economy, and their cultural and religious spirit, which enriches our local communities. While we accept these contributions, we do so at the expense of the human beings who come here not to harm us, but to help us. They are often ridiculed, exploited, and abused. This must stop, and this immoral system must be changed.” (Nicholas DiMarzio, Bishop of Brooklyn, Statement at the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, October 4, 2003)

- **Restores due process protections to our immigration enforcement policies**

“In order to achieve real reform, the Administration and Congress must work together on a comprehensive package. This would legalize undocumented migrants and their families in the U.S., provide legal means for migrants to enter our nation to work and support their families, and reform the system whereby immigrants come to the United States to be reunited with close family members. We also must restore due process protections to immigrants, many of which were taken away under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996.”

([Statement by Gerald F. Kicanas, Bishop of Tucson, Arizona, before the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security, February 11, 2015](#))

- **Addresses the root causes of migration, such as persecution and economic disparity.**

“Every human being has the right to freedom of movement within the confines of his own country. When conditions are unbearable, he must have the right to migrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of citizenship in the universal society, the worldwide fellowship of men.” (John Paul II, Address to the New World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Immigrants - October 17, 1985) The suffering caused by poverty, food insecurity, violent conflicts, persecution, and environmental destruction prompts individuals to leave their homes in search of safety and a better life. Our faith compels us to reduce the need for people to leave their homes. The United States should promote sustainable development by implementing more just foreign assistance and trade policies. Investment in such development provides alternatives to migration for individuals seeking safe and secure futures for their families. It would also reduce the need for costly border enforcement, detention, and deportation estimated at almost \$18 billion in 2012. Immigration reform will not be effective nor truly comprehensive until the U.S. Congress addresses the underlying causes that drive people from their homes.

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