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# UNLOCKING THE GATE IN OUR HEARTS



## ABRIENDO LA PUERTA DE NUESTRO CORAZÓN

*A Statement of the Catholic Bishops of Minnesota  
on the Need for Federal Immigration Reform*

*Declaración de los obispos Católicos de Minnesota  
sobre la necesidad de una reforma inmigratoria a nivel federal*

MARCH 2012

**W**e, the Roman Catholic Bishops of Minnesota, are deeply concerned about the nation's immigration policy. It is inconsistent, ineffective, and does not promote the common good. The lack of an effective, coherent national policy has led to the introduction of many bills in state legislatures around the country, including in Minnesota, that seek to address the complex issue of immigration.

Such bills are a response to the failure of the current federal immigration laws and regulations to halt illegal immigration and the resulting economic, social, and fiscal impact this has had on many state and local governments.

Enforcement-focused state legislation, however, often divides immigrant families and criminalizes the efforts of those who work with immigrants. State legislation cannot repair a failed national policy.

Thus, we seek to reiterate our support for comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level, as well as propose the relevant principles that should guide those reforms.

We recognize that finding solutions to the plight of immigrants today will sometimes necessitate the overcoming of boundaries in the heart, not just on the land. People erect walls for protection when they feel threatened.

At some point, however, we must reach out to human persons in need, and the demands of our common human nature compel us to open a gate in the wall, so that what human dignity demands is not denied to a sister or brother. But before a gate finds its way into the walls outside, there must be a gate that opens in the heart.

This is what the Good Samaritan did: without denying the differences that kept Jews and Samaritans apart, he gave the assistance that was demanded of him by the

universal law of love—the law of our common humanity—by supplying the basic human needs of a poor stranger.

Like the Samaritan, we must see all people, including immigrants and undocumented workers who may be different from us, as children made in the image and likeness of God, and fashion our response to their needs accordingly.

### **Pursuing Life, Liberty, and Happiness While Recognizing Obligations**

The Church's perspective on immigration is rooted in her teaching that every human person is created in God's image and has God-given dignity, rights, and duties.

America's founders properly understood that human rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are universal and inalienable.

Governments merely recognize and respect these rights; they do not create them.

The human right to life—the foundation of every other right—implies the right to emigrate. A dignified existence that preserves life requires food, shelter, clothing, and economic opportunity. Political instability, economic distress, religious persecution, or other conditions that offend basic human dignity may require one to seek these basic

necessities in another country.

The right to emigrate, however, is not absolute. Immigrants are obliged to respect and abide by the laws and traditions of the countries in which they come to reside, and must work toward building solidarity with citizens of their new country of residence.

Catholic teaching also recognizes the sovereignty of nations to secure their borders and make decisions about the identity and number of immigrants they allow into their countries. Our government has the duty to consider immigration's impact on the domestic economy and our national security. Yet, we must always make sure that we are not exaggerating these concerns in ways that deny the basic humanitarian needs of good people seeking refuge in our country.

It is often true that undocumented workers

may break immigration laws to come to the United States. We wish to emphasize that a concern for upholding the law supports the common good. But it is also true that laws that undermine human dignity, separate families, and which prevent the exercise of basic human rights are unjust laws in need of reform. Good laws should not and need not exclude the possibility of mercy.

The United States is a nation of immigrants and our unique historical experience shows

### **Principled Immigration Policy**

We believe, with our brother bishops around the country, that policy proposals in this complex area should be assessed by five key principles:

1. Persons have the right to seek economic opportunities in their homeland; conditions ought to be such that persons can work and support their families in dignity and safety;
2. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families when they are unable to find work and therefore are unable to support their families at home;
3. Sovereign nations have a right to protect and control their borders for the common good;
4. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection; and
5. The human rights and human dignity of all persons, including undocumented immigrants, should be respected.

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the important contributions—social, cultural, and economic—that immigrants have made and continue to make to American society. Although immigrants have not always been received with hospitality, Minnesotans, like all Americans, have a responsibility to comfort and welcome the stranger in their midst.

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Minnesotans . . . have a responsibility to comfort and welcome the stranger in their midst.

*In addition, any just immigration policy should also:*

- ◆ Uphold the human dignity of all persons and work against any injustice that compromises the dignity of immigrants;
- ◆ Promote and give priority to the reunification of families; and
- ◆ Recognize the rich contribution to the community by those immigrants and migrants who work and live here.

These Catholic moral principles are consistent with America's founding ideals and aspirations to be one nation under God, a people made up of many races and creeds.

Based on these principles the American bishops support comprehensive immigration policy reform that secures our national borders and provides undocumented immigrants the opportunity to earn permanent residency and eventual citizenship.

*Such reform should include:*

- ◆ an earned legalization program for foreign nationals of good moral character;
- ◆ policies designed to keep families together;
- ◆ a revamped temporary worker program that protects both the workers who come to the United States and U.S.-citizen workers;
- ◆ the restoration of immigrants' due process rights; and
- ◆ an effort to meaningfully address the root cause of migration, such as underdevelopment and poverty in countries of immigrant origin.

Moreover, such reform would include the targeted, proportionate, and humane enforcement of immigration laws.

*We ask that people join us in prayer to God for a just, yet merciful solution to the plight of immigrants in our country.*

## Taking Action

Legislation at the state level cannot achieve necessary reform of national policy. Such legislation also could result in conflicting laws among the states that could lead to the abuse of human rights, disruptions of families in ways that adversely affect children, and send a message of hostility when Jesus calls us to welcome the stranger, and to love others as He has loved us.

The more fruitful approach would be for public officials in our state, and all of us as citizens, to petition Congress and the President to courageously enact

comprehensive immigration reform.

We encourage members of the Minnesota Legislature to reject any measures that are in opposition to the fundamental human dignity of immigrants—especially the undocumented; and we encourage the Minnesota congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. to work for just and compassionate reform of the nation's immigration system.

Finally, we ask that people join us in prayer to God for a just, yet merciful solution to the plight of immigrants in our country.

*Sincerely,* \_\_\_\_\_

The Most Rev. John C. Nienstedt  
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

The Most Rev. John M. LeVoir  
Bishop of New Ulm

The Most Rev. Paul D. Sirba  
Bishop of Duluth

The Most Rev. Lee A. Piché  
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# ABRIENDO LA PUERTA DE NUESTRO CORAZÓN



*Declaración de los obispos Católicos de Minnesota  
sobre la necesidad de una reforma inmigratoria a nivel federal*

MARZO 2012

**N**osotros, los obispos católicos de Minnesota, estamos profundamente preocupados por la política de inmigración en nuestro país. Es inconsistente, ineficaz, y no promueve el bien común.

La falta de una política nacional eficaz y congruente ha llevado a la introducción de muchos proyectos de ley en las legislaturas estatales a través del país, incluso en Minnesota, que tratan de abordar el tema complejo de la inmigración.

Estos proyectos de ley son una respuesta al fracaso de las leyes federales de inmigración actuales y regulaciones para frenar la inmigración ilegal y el impacto económico, social y fiscal que como resultado de ésta han tenido muchos gobiernos estatales y locales.

Sin embargo, una legislación estatal que se enfoca en el cumplimiento de la ley, divide a menudo a las familias inmigrantes y criminaliza los esfuerzos de aquellos que trabajan con ellos. La legislación del Estado no puede reparar una política nacional que ha fallado.

Por lo tanto, deseamos reiterar nuestro apoyo a la reforma integral de inmigración a nivel federal, así como proponer los principios relevantes que deben guiar esas reformas.

Reconocemos que encontrar soluciones a la dura situación de los inmigrantes de hoy a veces requiere la superación de las fronteras del corazón y no sólo las de la tierra. La gente levanta muros de protección cuando se sienten amenazados.

Sin embargo, en algún momento, debemos echar una mano a los seres humanos en necesidad, y las exigencias de nuestra naturaleza humana común nos obligan a abrir una puerta en el muro, de modo que lo que exige la dignidad humana no se le niegue a una hermana o hermano. Pero antes de encontrar una puerta que abra las paredes exteriores debe haber una puerta que se abre dentro del corazón.

Esto es lo que hizo el Buen Samaritano: sin negar las diferencias que mantenían separados a judíos y samaritanos, dio la asistencia que le exigía la ley universal del amor—la ley común de nuestra humanidad—mediante el suministro de las necesidades básicas a un pobre extranjero.

Al igual que el Samaritano, debemos ver a todas las personas, inclusive los inmigrantes y los trabajadores indocumentados que puedan ser diferentes a nosotros, como hijos creados a imagen y semejanza de Dios, y crear una respuesta de acuerdo a sus necesidades.

### **Buscando la vida, la libertad y la felicidad sin dejar de reconocer obligaciones**

La perspectiva de la Iglesia en materia de inmigración se fundamenta en la enseñanza de que toda persona humana es creada a imagen de Dios y ha recibido de Dios dignidad, derechos y deberes.

Los fundadores de los Estados Unidos bien entendieron que los derechos humanos a la vida, la libertad y la búsqueda de la felicidad son universales e inalienables. Los gobiernos meramente reconocen y respetan estos derechos, pero no los crean.

El derecho humano a la vida—el fundamento de cualquier otro derecho—implica el derecho a emigrar. Una existencia digna que conserva a la vida requiere alimento, refugio, ropa, y oportunidad económica. La inestabilidad política, dificultades económicas, la persecución religiosa, u otras condiciones que

ofenden la dignidad humana pueden requerir que uno busque estas necesidades básicas en otro país.

El derecho a emigrar, sin embargo, no es absoluto. Los inmigrantes están obligados a respetar y acatar las leyes y tradiciones de los países a los que vienen a residir, y deben trabajar hacia la construcción de la solidaridad con los ciudadanos de su nuevo país de residencia.

La enseñanza católica reconoce también la soberanía de las naciones para asegurar sus fronteras y tomar decisiones acerca de la identidad y el número de inmigrantes que permiten en sus países. Nuestro gobierno tiene el deber de considerar el impacto de la inmigración sobre la economía doméstica y nuestra seguridad nacional. Sin embargo, debemos siempre

asegurarnos de que no estamos exagerando estas preocupaciones de manera que nieguen las necesidades humanitarias básicas de personas buenas que buscan refugio en nuestro país.

Es cierto que a menudo trabajadores indocumentados pueden violar las leyes de inmigración para llegar a los Estados Unidos. Queremos enfatizar que la preocupación por la defensa de la ley respalda el bien común. Pero también es cierto que las leyes que atentan en contra de la dignidad humana, separan las familias e impiden

### **Una política de inmigración basada en principios**

Unidos a nuestros hermanos obispos en todo el país, creemos que las propuestas políticas en este ámbito complejo deben ser evaluadas por cinco principios fundamentales:

1. Las personas tienen el derecho de buscar oportunidades económicas en su país de origen, y las condiciones deben ser tales que las personas puedan trabajar y mantener a sus familias con dignidad y seguridad;
2. Las personas tienen derecho a emigrar para mantenerse a sí mismos y a sus familias cuando son incapaces de encontrar trabajo y por lo tanto incapaces de mantener a sus familias en el hogar;
3. Naciones soberanas tienen derecho a proteger y controlar sus fronteras para el bien común;
4. Los refugiados y solicitantes de asilo deben recibir protección, y
5. Los derechos humanos y la dignidad humana de todas las personas, inclusive los inmigrantes sin documentos, deben ser respetados.

**Reconocemos que encontrar soluciones a la dura situación de los inmigrantes de hoy a veces requiere la superación de las fronteras del corazón y no sólo las de la tierra.**

el ejercicio de los derechos humanos son leyes injustas y necesitadas de reforma. Las leyes buenas no deben y no tienen por qué excluir la posibilidad de la misericordia.

Los Estados Unidos es una nación de inmigrantes y nuestra experiencia histórica única muestra la contribución importante social, cultural y económica que los inmigrantes han hecho y siguen haciendo a la sociedad americana. Aunque los inmigrantes no han sido siempre recibidos con hospitalidad, los residentes de Minnesota, como todos

los estadounidenses, tienen la responsabilidad de consolar y dar bienvenida al forastero en medio de ellos.

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*Además, cualquier política de inmigración debe también:*

- ◆ Defender la dignidad humana de todas las personas y oponerse a cualquier injusticia que pone en peligro la dignidad de los inmigrantes;
- ◆ Promover y dar prioridad a la reunificación de las familias, y
- ◆ Reconocer la valiosa contribución a la comunidad de esos inmigrantes que trabajan y viven aquí.

Estos principios morales católicos están en consonancia con los ideales fundadores de los Estados Unidos y las aspiraciones de ser una nación sometida a Dios, un pueblo formado por muchas razas y credos.

Basados en estos principios los obispos estadounidenses apoyamos la reforma política de inmigración que protege nuestras fronteras nacionales, y ofrece a los inmigrantes indocumentados la oportunidad de obtener residencia permanente y eventualmente la ciudadanía.

*Dicha reforma debe incluir:*

- ◆ un programa de legalización que premie a los extranjeros de buen carácter moral;
- ◆ una política diseñada para mantener las familias unidas;
- ◆ un programa renovado para los trabajadores temporales que protege tanto a los trabajadores que vienen a los Estados Unidos y los trabajadores de EE.UU. que son ciudadanos;
- ◆ la restauración de los derechos de los



- inmigrantes a un proceso justo, y
- ◆ un esfuerzo para abordar de manera significativa la causa de la migración, tales como el subdesarrollo y la pobreza en los países de origen del inmigrante.

Dicha reforma incluiría la aplicación específica, proporcional y humana de las leyes de inmigración.

*Las leyes buenas no deben y no tienen por qué excluir la posibilidad de la misericordia.*

### **Tomando Acción**

La legislación a nivel estatal no puede lograr la reforma necesaria a nivel nacional. Dicha legislación también puede resultar en un conflicto de leyes entre los estados que podrían conducir a la violación de los derechos humanos, interrupciones a las familias

que afectan negativamente a los niños, y que envían un mensaje de hostilidad cuando Jesús nos llama a acoger al forastero, y amar a los demás como Él nos ha amado.

El enfoque más fructífero sería que los funcionarios públicos de nuestro estado, y todos nosotros los ciudadanos, pidieramos al Congreso y al Presidente valientemente promulgar una reforma inmigratoria integral.

Animamos a los miembros de la Legislatura de Minnesota a que rechazen medidas opuestas a la dignidad humana fundamental de los inmigrantes—en particular de los indocumentados, y pedimos a los representantes de Minnesota en el Congreso en Washington, DC, que trabajen a favor de una reforma justa y compasiva del sistema de inmigración en nuestra nación.

Finalmente, rogamos que la gente nos acompañe en la oración a Dios, para pedir una solución justa, y a la vez misericordiosa, para la

## *Atentamente,*

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The Most Rev. John C. Nienstedt  
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

The Most Rev. John M. LeVoir  
Bishop of New Ulm

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# HOW TO TAKE ACTION

## ONLINE IMMIGRATION RESOURCES

### Minnesota Catholic Conference: Migration Advocacy

MCC resource page with background on parish, state, and federal-based migration advocacy activities of the Catholic bishops of Minnesota, including Immigration Sunday MN. [www.mncc.org/advocacy-areas/migration/](http://www.mncc.org/advocacy-areas/migration/)

### Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

CLINIC is a 501 (c)(3) organization created by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to support a rapidly growing network of community-based immigration programs. [www.cliniclegal.org](http://www.cliniclegal.org)

### Justice for Immigrants Campaign

USCCB advocacy organization calling for comprehensive immigration reform in Congress. [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org)

### USCCB Office of Migration and Refugee Services

[www.usccb.org/mrs/](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/)

### Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People

[www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/migrants/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/index.htm)

### Papal Messages on Migration: 1996-2010

Messages on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees  
[www.usccb.org/mrs/papalstatements.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/papalstatements.shtml)

### Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope

A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States (January 2003). [www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml)

### Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity

A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops (November 2000).  
[www.usccb.org/mrs/unity.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/mrs/unity.shtml)

### 2010 Statement of the Catholic Bishops of Minnesota on Immigration

[www.mncc.org/statement-from-the-catholic-bishops-of-minnesota-on-immigration-june-2010/](http://www.mncc.org/statement-from-the-catholic-bishops-of-minnesota-on-immigration-june-2010/)

## ADVOCACY

The Minnesota Catholic Conference is the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota. It serves the purpose of putting our Catholic faith into action for the betterment, or common good, of society. MCC supports the ministry of our state's Catholic bishops by:

- ◆ Working with political and community leaders to shape legislation that serves human dignity and the common good
- ◆ Educating Catholics and the public about the ethical and moral framework that should be applied to public policy choices
- ◆ Mobilizing the Catholic community to make its voice heard in the public arena

The Minnesota bishops themselves constitute the membership of MCC, representing the six Minnesota dioceses: Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Diocese of Crookston, Diocese of Duluth, Diocese of New Ulm, Diocese of St. Cloud, and Diocese of Winona. They are supported by a staff of Catholic laity.

### Forming your conscience

Catholics have a lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church. Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere *feeling* about what we should or should not do. Conscience always requires serious attempts to make sound judgments based on moral truth and objective reality.

The formation of conscience requires three main elements. First, there must be within the person a desire to seek and embrace goodness and truth. For Catholics, this includes a willingness to listen to the guidance of the Church with the recognition that the Church is blessed with the unique charism of the Holy Spirit to lead the faithful and all people of good will into the light of truth. Next, it is important to examine the issues and consider how they affect human dignity and the common good. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential for fostering sound judgment.

To assist the laity in their task of conscience formation, "priests and deacons, assisted by religious and lay leaders of the Church . . . are to teach fundamental moral principles that help Catholics form their consciences correctly, to provide guidance on the moral dimensions of public decisions, and to encourage the faithful to carry out their responsibilities in political life" (USCCB, "Faithful Citizenship," No. 15).

One way that Minnesota Catholics can participate in political life and find information to help form their conscience is through the Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC).

### Taking action

MNCAN, the Minnesota Catholic Conference Advocacy Network, is MCC's web-based, grassroots network of lay and religious persons. Network members are able to communicate with lawmakers and stay current on areas of public policy concern for Catholics, like access to education, immigration reform, human trafficking, poverty and economics, religious liberty, and life, marriage, and family issues.

Network sign-up requires a name, email and mailing address. When users receive an email action alert, background information is provided related to the public policy issue that requires a Catholic response, along with a message that can be sent to legislators. To sign up and begin receiving action alerts:

- ◆ Visit [www.mncc.org](http://www.mncc.org)
- ◆ Click the MN Catholic Advocacy Network (MNCAN) icon in the right corner of the home page to be taken to the Legislative Action Center
- ◆ Hit "Click Here" to join MNCAN
- ◆ Enter your information in the required fields, including name, email and home address
- ◆ Customize your action areas in the "Interest" section
- ◆ Click "Submit"

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For additional copies of this SPOTLIGHT issue,  
contact the **Minnesota Catholic Conference** at:

651-227-8777  
[info@mncc.org](mailto:info@mncc.org)

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