

PRAYER OF ST FRANCIS – RESPECTING LIFE - THE IMMIGRANT

"For it is in pardoning that we are pardoned"

As one Catholic Cardinal observed, "How is it that nearly twenty-one centuries after Jesus Christ, we still fail to see the migrant as our neighbor?" We are challenged as Catholic Christians by the United States Catholic Bishops to recognize the face of Christ in the face of the immigrant, especially the undocumented immigrant. Raising our consciousness about the complicated questions surrounding immigration, and how we are called to be Christ to people trying to escape poverty and violence, is the focus of our discussion of the Prayer of St. Francis this month. St. Francis and we pray, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, where there is injury, [let me sow] pardon."

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, a nonpartisan research organization in Washington, about 11.2 million illegal immigrants were living in the United States in 2010. Each year approximately 300,000 more unauthorized individuals enter the U. S. The Pew report also found that about 350,000 babies were born in 2009 to families with at least one illegal immigrant parent. People come to this country now for the same reasons that brought many of our ancestors to the U. S.: to escape poverty, war, political unrest, and persecution and to gain political, religious and economic freedom and to create a better life for their families. Many undocumented individuals come here to be reunited with loved ones, were brought here as children by parents seeking to provide for their families, or were simply born here to undocumented parents. According the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, most of the unauthorized immigrants come from Mexico, as many of the Mexican people are struggling with severe poverty and families find it impossible to meet their basic needs. Legal channels for immigration are very limited and thus, to survive, people find illegal and very dangerous means to enter the U. S. These individuals often fall victim to human smugglers or tragically perish trying to cross the Southwest's treacherous deserts. These individuals are often apprehended when crossing to the U. S. or later while here illegally and are incarcerated as criminals without due process and held for deportation.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) provides guidance regarding the Church's position on immigration. The "USCCB opposes 'enforcement only' immigration polices and supports comprehensive immigration reform." The elements of this recommended reform include: a path to earned legalization; a foreign worker program; family-based immigration reform that promotes family reunification; restoration of due process rights; and actions which address the root causes of migration; and legitimate, humane enforcement.

Some suggested actions steps we might take ton increase our awareness and to take to heart the call of the Prayer of St. Francis might be:

- Visit the National Catholic Bishops website to read United States Catholic Bishops call for just immigration reform:
<www.justiceforimmigrants.com>
- Watch one or both videos, "Dying to Live," and "Strangers No Longer," available for check out and viewing from the St. Stan's Library.
- Participate in the monthly Inter-faith Prayer Vigil in support of immigrant rights. The vigil takes place from 2:30 to 3 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month at the Ramsey County Detention

Center at 425 Grove St., Saint Paul, in support of undocumented immigrants and their families held in detention for deportation.

- Contact your federal and state legislators, asking them to support just, humane and comprehensive immigration reform, as encouraged by all main-line religions.

— Social Justice Committee —