"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me ..."
A PASTORAL LETTER *on the* HUMAN RIGHTS *of* IMMIGRANTS

Summary Outline

Updated November 2026

BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. The Church is obligated to proclaim the full truth of the Gospel in controversial areas of faith and morality about which there is confusion among the faithful.
    a. The human rights of undocumented immigrants is a moral issue of social justice.
    b. All humans have been endowed by our creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are the right to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. (U.S. Declaration of Independence)
        i. Because they come to us from God, no government has the authority to deny us these rights. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but to God what belongs to God. (Mt 22:21)
        ii. Though inalienable, these rights are limited by the common good.
        iii. One such right is the right to immigrate when circumstances so require.

2. The right to Life includes the right of access to the basic necessities of life.
    a. Necessities include food, clothing, shelter, basic medical care and access to decent employ ment.
    b. Parents are obligated to protect their children and provide for them.
    c. If they cannot do so in their place of origin, there comes a point when persons are obligated to pursue other options, including immigration.

3. The right to Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness includes the right to participate in the life of the community.
    a. There are to be no second-class residents in the community.
    b. All have equal access to the exercise of power and the distribution of goods and services.

The reality of undocumented immigration

1. There are about 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States.
    a. There are impossible barriers placed on people who want to enter the U.S. legally.
    b. National borders have almost never prevented immigration when there were strong economic reasons for migration.

Summary Outline, continued

c. Expelling 12 million people is not realistic historically, socially or economically.
d. Only real choice: facilitate the process for the common good or try to create as much misery as possible — and reap the undesirable consequences.

2. The economic principle of supply and demand.
   a. There are insufficient legal avenues for immigrants to enter the U.S. compared to the num ber of jobs in need of workers.
   b. Insufficient opportunities for employment exist in the countries of origin.

The "common good"

1. The common good is the shared good of all residents of the community, the nation and, by extension, the entire human family.
   a. The common good is in contrast to the perceived self-interest of a particular nation or group within society.
   b. There are circumstances where the common good might prevent migration.
2. National borders are at the service of the common good, for example:
   a. They are necessary to create order within and security between nations.
   b. They protect the legitimate sovereignty and identity of the state.
   c. They enable the state to safeguard the rights of its members.
3. The rule of law is at the service of the common good.
   a. There is nothing sacred about the law in itself. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. (Mk 2:27)
      i. The law is sacred only insofar as it is rooted in truth and justice, and is in the service of the common good.
      ii. Unjust laws create disrespect for the rule of law, when people must evade the law in order to exercise their basic human rights.
   b. Any government which refused to recognize human rights or acted in violation of them would not only fail in its duty; its decrees would be wholly without binding force. (Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, par. 71)

The Church does not promote illegal immigration

1. The Church does support those who have no other alternative in the exercise of their basic human right to immigrate when circumstances so require.
2. The Church works to remove the causes of illegal immigration.
   a. The Church promotes policies that reflect the economic realities that underlie immi gration and allow the free flow of otherwise law-abiding people.
   b. The Church works to remedy the international inequalities of wealth and foster eco nomic development in migrant countries of origin.
   c. The Church works to create a system that welcomes immigrants, facilitates their ad aptation to life in the United States and provides a timely and just path to citizenship.

— Bishop Anthony B. Taylor