

Catholic Teaching on Immigration

As Catholics, what should we think about people who come to this country as immigrants? Should we support people breaking the law by coming here without documentation or permission? What does the Church say about immigration?

The Church teaches that people have a fundamental right to economic, political, and social opportunity in their homelands. But when people cannot find employment in their home countries and cannot support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere to survive. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders, but wealthy nations that are better able to protect and feed their residents are obligated to accommodate migration flows. In addition, those who flee violence and persecution should find special protection from the global community. (Read more about these principles [here](#).)

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has explained that yes, immigrants should come to this country lawfully, but that our current immigration laws are broken. They do not adequately reunify families and they are not responsive to our country's need for labor.

There are currently three core means by which an immigrant might become a permanent resident. First, a qualified family member in the U.S. can request residency for spouses, parents, children, or siblings. There are eligibility requirements for this program, however, and limits to the numbers of people accepted. For those who qualify, the wait can last between five and 20 years, which places an unjust burden on families who are split up during that time and facing additional stressors.

Second, immigrants can seek asylum in the U.S. if they are fleeing persecution, but there is a high standard of proof for these claims, and the U.S. only accepts a limited number of refugees (typically around 80,000). In addition, most of the undocumented immigrants in the U.S. today are fleeing poverty in their own countries, not persecution.

Third, there are several immigration categories that allow American employers to sponsor workers to come to the U.S. to work and live lawfully. But because of their requirements, caps, and

duration, these programs come nowhere near meeting the demand from U.S. businesses that need low-skilled laborers.

When Pope Francis addressed Congress during his 2015 visit to America, he said more about migrants who are seeking a new life in the U.S.: “Thousands of persons are led to travel north in search of a better life for themselves and for their loved ones, in search of greater opportunities. Is this not what we want for our own children? We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal.”