

Archdiocese of Omaha



Statement of the Most Reverend Elden Francis Curtiss
Archbishop of Omaha
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THE CONCERN OF THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY FOR FAMILIES OF IMMIGRANT HISPANIC WORKERS IN NEBRASKA

Recent enforcement actions by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Omaha and Grand Island remind us once again that our present immigration system is not working. I wish to express my concern about the impact these actions have upon the families of those who are deported. Oftentimes children are left behind when their fathers and mothers are deported with no one to care for them. These enforcement actions also create fear in the wider immigrant community that can cause people to be isolated and exploited. Many parishes in the Archdiocese of Omaha serve our Catholic brothers and sisters who are in the immigrant community and they, too, are impacted by the enforcement actions.

Certainly ICE has the responsibility of enforcing the laws of our country, yet I do not see how this type of enforcement adequately deals with the issue of 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. Last Spring while Congress was debating the immigration issue, I expressed my views and those of the United States Bishops in a letter that appeared in the *Catholic Voice*. I reiterate that our current immigration system is seriously flawed and requires comprehensive reform. The system we currently employ is unjust because it uses the labor of undocumented immigrants without extending them the protection of our laws. They are subject to exploitation in the workplace, abuse by unscrupulous smugglers, and death in the desert. The present system is morally unacceptable and must be changed.

The best solution to this problem is the enactment of a comprehensive immigration reform bill. Such a bill should include 1) A path to permanent residence for the undocumented in the nation which allows them to earn permanent residency over time; 2). A worker program which allows foreign-born workers to enter safely and legally into the country while guaranteeing them protection in the workplace; 3). Family-based immigration reform to reduce waiting times for family reunification; 4). Restoration of due process protections for immigrants; and 5). Policies which address the root causes of migration, such as global economic inequality.

The Catholic Church is involved in the immigration debate because the teachings in the Old and New Testaments, the encyclicals of the Popes and documents of the U.S. Bishops, call upon us to “welcome the stranger” and to remember that “what you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me.”

The Catholic Church does not support or encourage illegal immigration. However, once the immigrant is in our midst they must be treated with the dignity and care that every human person deserves. The Church recognizes the right of nations to control their borders and govern the numbers of peoples who enter through the border. At the same time the Church teaches that people have the right to cross international boundaries to flee political repression and social upheaval, or to find relief from severe economic hardship which threatens their lives or the lives of their family members. We have to balance basic human issues with our national interests; we have to protect immigrant workers who come to this country because they need work and we need them.