

'They are blessed who welcome strangers'

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Immigration is a subject that should be of interest to us all. For one thing, all of us are here, enjoying the blessings of life in the United States, because we are descended from immigrants. Each family has its own story. Some of the stories are happy, some sad. But the fact remains that, if there had been no immigration somewhere in the past, we wouldn't be here today.

Another reason why immigration should be of interest to us is because it is a human rights question. The social teaching of the church calls for ordered opportunities for immigration simply because seeking a better life and a wider spectrum of opportunities is a fundamental human right.

Our country is now facing some difficult and complicated questions in the context of immigration. We haven't done very well in providing an orderly way for persons from other countries to become participants in the life of the United States. Present laws are complicated and restrictive. All too often they seem to look on immigrants as enemies rather than as dedicated men and women who want to find a new life for themselves and contribute to the life of our country.

Two approaches for reform are presently being offered to our legislators in Washington.

The first is a proposal which has already passed the House of Representatives (H.R. 4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005). This approach is restrictive and punitive. It would make "unlawful presence" a felony. It would make anyone who assists an undocumented alien, even by the provision of basic human assistance, liable to criminal penalties.

The other approach is presently in the Judiciary Committee of the Senate (S. 1033, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act). This law has been proposed with bi-partisan backing by Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and John McCain (R-AZ). It provides for an orderly program of immigrant assimilation that is attentive to the needs of families. It respects the human dignity of those who wish to participate in the life of our country, while taking account of the needs of our national security.

I therefore urge Catholics and other citizens of our area to write letters and make phone calls to our Senators asking them to reject the restrictive proposals of the House bill and support the enlightened, comprehensive reforms of the Senate bill.

It is well for us to remember who said that they are blessed who welcome strangers.

Sincerely yours,
Most. Rev. Daniel E. Pilarczyk
Archbishop of Cincinnati