



Franciscan Family of the United States

Following the Spirit of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare of Assisi
To Bring Healing, Reconciliation and Peace

May 17, 2006

Dear Senator:

We write to you today as the leadership from Catholic Religious Orders and Congregations following the spirit of Saints Clare and Francis of Assisi. Collectively, we serve in every state of the United States in several hundred distinct ministries. **We write to express our desire for the immediate passage of humane and comprehensive immigration reform legislation.**

Many of our ministries serve immigrant populations. We have come to know these persons to be active and hardworking members of our neighborhoods and communities, whose chief concerns are care for their family and the betterment of their society. As religious communities, our interest in comprehensive immigration reform arises from the reality that the current immigration system is severely broken. Immigrants, both documented and undocumented, entering into the U.S. are suffering in the current system. As religious leaders, as pastoral ministers and simply as persons of conscience, it is our moral duty to voice this call for reform.

As the full Senate enters into this debate on immigration reform, it is our sincere hope that the resulting legislation and amendments that might be added will adhere to a basic set of social justice principles. For us as Catholics these are the same as our U.S. Bishops have delineated:

1. Persons have the right to find opportunities first in their own homelands.
2. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
3. Sovereign nations have a right to control their borders.
4. Refugees and asylum seekers must be afforded protection.
5. The human rights and human dignities of undocumented migrants must be respected.

To adhere to these moral standards, at a minimum, the legislation to be passed by the Senate should:

- Establish a fair and manageable process for immigrants, documented and undocumented, to establish legal permanent residency and U.S. citizenship.
- Include provisions that work to maintain and/or restore immigrant family unity
- Provide opportunities for young immigrants brought to the U.S. as children to attend college as well as move towards legal permanent residency and citizenship
- Not have enforcement mechanisms, like those found in HR 4437, *The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005*, that attack the human dignity of immigrants, by “criminalizing” undocumented immigrants and those who provide them with humanitarian assistance.

In the past 30 years, our communities and congregations have been transformed from being immigrant groups of primarily European origin to being ones that are strongly diverse and multicultural. We have had our own difficulties with U.S. Immigration and Naturalization/U.S. Homeland Security Department in being able to welcome our own brothers and sisters, especially those that come from Africa, Asia and Central and South America.

Welcoming these members into what were formally European groups has not always been easy. However, in the process of building multicultural and diverse communities, we have become stronger and better in our service to others. We believe that by extension, the United States will become a stronger and better nation, if we find ways to help immigrants enter onto a pathway to citizenship and fuller participation in civic life.

In the past months, we have witnessed with joy millions of people protesting peacefully in the streets across our nation seeking justice for immigrants. Our hearts have been uplifted by their message proclaiming themselves to be human beings with dignity and not "criminals." We are humbled that we have been able to stand in solidarity with them as they assert that their human rights be recognized.

We are proud to continue this stance of solidarity by expressing our sincere hope that you will cast a vote in the Senate that will welcome immigrants to take their rightful place in building our nation and world.

Be assured of our prayers for you as you discern and debate this most important legislation. May you be blessed with a heart of welcome and peace.

Sincerely,

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