



# Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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## Immigration: Welcoming the Stranger Today

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**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,  
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Heb. 13:2)**

### EXPERIENCE

The phenomena of migration and immigration present complex problems to both our international and national communities. They affect nations of origin (for example, the exodus of medical personnel from the Philippines), of transit (the multiplication of refugee camps in Kenya for Sudanese citizens), and of destination (reflected in the current US debate about the “strangers” among us). Most citizens of other countries in the US are within our borders legally, as visitors, students, lawful permanent residents, persons granted asylum from persecution in their home countries, and refugees.

There are also immigrants who are within our borders illegally, the majority having left their homelands out of economic necessity. More and more, undocumented immigrants are women and children. An example is the poorest woman in any country, with no health care, shelter, or education, facing daily abuse, scavenging

for food for her child who may be handicapped; add to that one more factor – that she entered the country unlawfully – and her poverty is compounded. She also may have to live threatened by xenophobia, sexual slavery, border patrol detention, possible separation from her child, and deportation because of the nature of her entrance.

### SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Most US citizens agree with a Catholic News Service report last year that observed, “our immigration system is a mess.” Four main reasons account for this:

**First:** Between 8.5 million and 12 million undocumented immigrants currently live here. Removing all of them would be logistically impossible. Even if it were possible, it would economically devastate industries such as agriculture and others that depend on their labor.

**Second:** Those illegally in the US live largely outside the scrutiny of security agencies and are subject to exploitation by employers, smugglers and others.

**Third:** Since the mid-1990s, when the government began closing off many traditional points for crossing our southern border illegally near cities, an estimated 3,000 people have died trying to get here across harsh desert and mountain terrain in remote areas.

**Fourth:** The current system for awarding visas to enter the US cannot meet the demand, leaving millions of families separated for years while they patiently await processing of visas approved long before, and leading others to try to enter illegally to join their families.

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We know, too, that globalization has flung markets wide open but not frontiers; and that migration is directly linked to inequality between north and south, to economic and social imbalance, and to the proliferation of civil wars and conflicts. The saddest fact is that the US government has not only set many increasingly restrictive immigration policies, such as restricting the already small number of approved refugees who may enter annually and making it harder for those seeking asylum in the past few years, but, it has also fostered a punitive American attitude and tone on immigration. We wince at racist shrillness on talk radio; we read venomous letters to the editor; and, we witness triumphant vigilantes tracking humans in the Arizona desert.

## REFLECTION

The Catholic Church and other faith traditions are intentionally involved in the immigration and migration debate because “The Old Testament is about a refugee people and the New Testament is about a refugee family,” wrote Matt Wilch, policy director at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. Further, the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, call believers to “welcome the stranger,” because “what you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do unto me.” (Mt. 25-35, 40) Believers also benefit from this welcoming “for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb. 13:2).

Practical hospitality and a welcoming attitude to strangers create the space for mutual transformation and even reconciliation, because it is our response to the generosity and graciousness of God to us. In today’s context the “stranger” includes not only the people unknown to us, those who are poor and the exploited, but also those who are ethnically, culturally and religiously “others”

to us. Our willingness to accept others in their “otherness” is the hallmark of true hospitality. Through our openness to the “other” we may encounter God in new ways. Thus, hospitality is both the fulfillment of the commandment to “love our neighbors as ourselves” and an opportunity to discover God anew. (Welcoming the Stranger, World Council of Churches 9th Assembly, 2006)

In addition to scripture, encyclicals and episcopal pastoral letters form the basis for the Catholic Church’s position. (USCCB - (MRS) - PCMR Resource Brief No. 8: Scriptural and Official Catholic Church Statements Applicable to Immigration Issues.) The US Catholic Church has historically been an immigrant church, and still today many of the Catholic faithful are immigrants who need support and assistance. The US bishops point out the moral consequences of our broken system and, in their document “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope,” they articulate five principles that should guide our treatment of all persons:

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

## ACTION

1. Help to shatter myths and stereotypes and promote a welcoming attitude among our members, associates, and co-workers through educational materials, programs and speakers, including immigrants themselves. Use DVDs such as “Dying to Live,” ([www.nd.edu/](http://www.nd.edu/)

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[~latino/units/clsc.htm](http://~latino/units/clsc.htm)) and “Strangers No Longer” (available soon from USCCB website below)

2. Develop and widely publish a stand in support of immigrants and migrants, and connect our Institutes with the Justice for Immigrants Campaign of the USCCB and other national and international groups. Visit the Campaign’s web for continually updated information: [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org).
3. Engage in legislative advocacy for comprehensive immigration reform and encourage others, especially associates and sponsored ministries, to join our efforts. Updated information can be found on the above website.
4. Use multi-lingual signs in our motherhouses and ministries saying, “Welcome.”
5. In response to caustic letters to the editor, write, and encourage others to write, letters about the immigrant children and adults with whom we minister and how they enrich us.
6. For those working more directly with immigrants, consider using a new resource from The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), “Immigrant-Led Organizers in Their Own Voices: Local Realities and Shared Visions.” Available for free on-line: [www.cliniclegal.org](http://www.cliniclegal.org), see New Report on Organizing.
7. Deepen a spirituality of hospitality. (A helpful article by Christine Pohl can be found on [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1988](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1988).)