The United States of America is a nation of immigrants. Throughout history, people have left their homelands for a wide variety of reasons – religious, economic, political – to resettle here. Today is no different.

In the early 20th century, as much as 15% of the US population was foreign born.

About ten years ago the US Census Bureau tells us our foreign-born population stood at 11.5%.

Most citizens in the US have an immigrant relative in the not too distant past.

So, what’s the US Bishops position on immigration reform? The US Bishops believe that the current US immigration system is broken and needs to be reformed in all aspects. This would include:

1. A path to citizenship for the 12 million (approx.) undocumented in the country
2. A temporary worker program to allow migrant workers to enter safely and humanely
3. A reform of the way that family-based immigrant visas are allocated so that family members can be reunited more quickly.

The Church also teaches that the root causes of migration – namely global economic disparity – need to be addressed.

The Church has taken a position on immigration because, besides being an economic, social and legal issue, it is also a human one and thus has great moral implications. What ever is human or touches on the human person or his or her dignity, is a concern for the Church. Jesus said, “What you do to the least of my brothers you do unto me.” Mt 25:40

Some charge that the Church is in favor of a nation without borders, that we support illegal immigration. The Church does not favor illegal immigration in any sense. It is not good for the immigrant who often suffers abuse by smugglers, exploitation in the workplace and even death in the desert.
It is not good for society or for local communities because it creates a permanent underclass with no rights and no opportunity to assert them.

That is why the Church supports the creation of legal avenues for migration and legal status for migrants.

The Church has always supported the right of a sovereign nation to secure its borders, although it should be done in a manner that protects human life to the greatest degree possible.

The so called “illegals” are not the problem. The problem that needs to be fixed is the broken system.

**Does the Church have a right to speak out on immigration reform?**

All public policy issues – abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, stem cell research, poverty education and immigration reform – have political aspects to them. The Church is well within her rights to speak out on public policy issues of moral consequences. In fact, the Church has a moral obligation to speak out on issues which impact human dignity and human life. In the immigration area, the Church brings special expertise to the table because of our long history in receiving and helping immigrants both into our Church and into American society.

**Is immigration good or bad for our country?**

Almost every Catholic in the US is only a generation or two removed from the immigrant experience. Only the most bigoted anti-Catholic would argue that we have not made a positive contribution to American life.

Our immigrant forbearers helped build up our nation. While opponents of immigration reform play on peoples fears that immigrants today take away jobs, change our culture and eat up public resources, the truth of the matter is immigrants continue to play a vital role in the development of America.

The majority of research studies in no way support the idea that immigration is harmful for America.

And so, we see throughout the country, immigrants bring new life and energy to many of our Catholic parishes.

Wait for Part II