

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

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Bishop's Office

December 3, 2009

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This year our Diocesan Public Policy Committee has chosen the crucial subject of comprehensive immigration reform as the targeted advocacy issue for Public Policy Weekend, February 13/14.

This issue has much local relevance. The rich orchards and farmlands along the Finger Lakes and Lake Ontario have long been a destination for people who move from one seasonal agricultural job to another. Many workers now come from Mexico and sometimes find themselves the targets of discrimination in a way reminiscent of that suffered by other predominantly Catholic immigrants, Irish, Italians, and Eastern Europeans among others.

As free trade agreements flooded Mexican markets with subsidized American corn, Mexican farmers were left without a market for their own crops. The border between Mexico and the United States divides an impoverished country with an unsettled government from a land of opportunity. It's often said that we hang two signs at the border: "keep out" and "help wanted." The "keep out" sign comes in the form of a fence and a militarized border that has forced border crossers into the less patrolled desert; more than 5,000 have died since 1994. The "help wanted" sign keeps the flow of desperate people coming even as the risk and the cost of accompaniment grow.

Migration holds a special significance for us as Catholics. The story of God's relationship with humans as told in the Hebrew Scriptures is the story of a migrant people. Abraham followed God's call to travel with Sarah to a new home; Joseph's family followed him to Egypt to avoid famine, and Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to a new life in the Land of Canaan. Even Jesus began his life as a stranger, born in a stable, fleeing with his family to Egypt to avoid persecution and spending the last three years of his life as a wanderer.

As Catholics we believe that all people are made in the image and likeness of God, deserving of our love and respect. We often disagree among ourselves about the best way to solve social and political problems, but our faith calls us to a common vision that is best expressed in Matthew 25: 34-36. "Come you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you

God's Love Endures Forever

made me welcome, naked and you clothed me, in prison and you visited me.” We readily recognize Jesus in the face of the immigrant; the challenging part is figuring out how to resolve a problem with no easy answers.

Our church recognizes both the right of countries to establish border controls and the right of individuals to migrate in order to live a life of human dignity. As we work towards trade agreements that allow people to support themselves in their countries of origin, we need to convince lawmakers to enact immigration reform that:

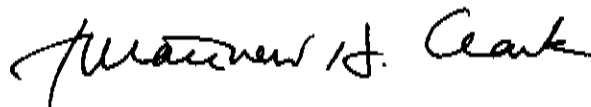
- Provides an earned path to citizenship for those who have been living and working in our country
- Protects families and encourages reunification
- Has legal pathways for temporary workers to come and work in a safe, humane and orderly manner and be able to return to their country of origin, and
- Restores due process protections for immigrants.

I encourage all of you to take advantage of these next few months to learn more about this challenging issue. Parishes provide a perfect forum for addressing such a controversial issue because we begin with a common language of love for one another. There will be those of you who are deeply concerned about security and others who envision a world without borders. I invite you to listen to each other respectfully without judgment or bias and to find areas of agreement.

For those who are ready to advocate for reform, please consider participating in the February postcard campaign.

As always, I remain

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew H. Clark". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

†Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester