



April 5, 2005

STATEMENT OF BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK ON IMMIGRATION REFORM

The following remarks were made at a news conference on 5 April 2006, at which Bishop Matthew Clark talked about the Church's position on immigration reform currently being debated in Congress.

Immigration reform is very much in the news, and has become an issue that is quickly polarizing our nation. Rather than add to this polarization, I would like to talk about what I believe should be the guiding principals for immigration reform – reform that is humane, does not resort to draconian tactics and does not ignores our long history as a nation built by immigrants.

I would like to do three things today and ask you to help me get the word out to Roman Catholics and all people concerned about this issue of immigration reform. Those three things are:

- To discuss reform in the context of our Catholic Social teachings – which call us to welcome the stranger and respect the dignity of every person
- To ask Catholics to both pray for just and humane immigration reform and to contact their representatives in Washington to make their feelings known
- To remind everyone that immigration reform is not some far away issue on the borders of Mexico, but very much a local one. Through our growing migrant ministry, I can tell you that some 17,000 migrant people here will be affected by any act of Congress on this issue. These good and hard-working people deserve our compassion and they deserve justice.

My brother bishops in the United States and I agree that any immigration reform must follow these principals I would like to outline briefly now:

1. **Reform Must Be Comprehensive.** We cannot take a narrow, restrictive one-dimensional approach, as was contained in the House-passed measure. We must deal fairly with all the issues such as what to do about undocumented immigrants working and living in the U.S., legalized forms of entry, and enforcement that is not overly harsh and respects the dignity of people.
2. **Reform must strengthen security but also not slam shut the doors of our nation.** Security is a crucial issue – but we must never become overzealous to the point at which we become indifferent to the plight of hard-working families and others who pose no threat -- that we never cease to say the words emblazoned on the Statue of Liberty, “give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”
3. **Reform must provide a pathway to residency and citizenship.** The undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S. must be given the opportunity to earn the right to stay and apply for citizenship if they satisfy certain criteria, including that they are not a security threat and not a criminal.
4. **Reform must provide for worker visas and protections.** There must be greater legal means by which needed workers can be admitted to fill available jobs. People must be able to enter and work in a safe, orderly, and dignified manner.
5. **Reform must keep families intact.** We must end the visa backlogs that have long separated families. Our immigration laws must ensure that family unity is facilitated and supported.

I ask Roman Catholics here, as well as all people of faith, to pray that the decisions of our lawmakers on this issue are guided by a sense of fair play, of history and of justice.

If they are so willing, I ask that they call or write their senators and representatives to ask for justice and fair reform

This is a human issue at the core. Our faith teaches us that we must love not only God but also our neighbor. In his first encyclical, *God is Love*, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show this love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much He loves me.”

In our own community, we benefit from the dedication, the sweat and toil, of people, mostly migrant laborers young and old, good people who long only to eat of the fruit, as well – the fruit of liberty, of opportunity, of happiness.

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