

Life Between Masses: **A Catholic Response to Immigration Policy**

On the Horns of a Dilemma

As Catholic Christian citizens many of us feel ourselves to be on the horns of a dilemma regarding immigration policy reform. On the one hand, immigration policy must be reformed. Americans have a right and responsibility to be in control of their borders and to have a rational approach to social, economic, and welfare policy. On the other hand, the Gospel requires us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Indeed, we are commanded to give freely of ourselves and our possessions to those less fortunate than we are for in the face of the poor, the weak, the immigrant, we will see the face of Jesus.

Our Faith Helps us Decide

The immigration reform debate is complicated and contentious. There are valid concerns regarding different policy perspectives. Because it can be confusing, many of us wish we could just ignore the need to make a decision. But decide we must. Can our Catholic faith help us choose among the various proposals regarding immigration reform? Yes it can.

Our political and economic decisions, just as our personal decisions, must be informed by the dictates of our faith. While the Catholic Church, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Bishop Tafoya do not create a particular immigration policy reform proposal, they do

offer a set of recommendations and insist that the consequences of our decisions, both individually and as a society, satisfy the demands of the gospel.

In light of this, we should ask ourselves the following question:

Have we made a decision that reflects our belief that our choices affect Jesus himself in the guise of the poor, the vulnerable, the immigrant? If not, then perhaps we have chosen to support the wrong position, or failed to actively support a position that we believe leads to the fulfillment of our religious obligation to promote the Reign of God. The need for policy reform, regardless of how bad the current policy, does not remove the obligation to proceed in a humane and Christian manner in formulating the reform.

The Facts Help Us Decide

- Immigrant workers, including the undocumented (those without legal status), pay substantial taxes, including Social Security taxes, which are largely uncollected.
- Immigrants do not come to the U.S. to take welfare, but to work and re-unite with their families.
- Today's immigrants are not much different than those of 100 years ago. In the early 20th century, 15% of the U.S. population was foreign-born. Today it is 11.5%. In a country of nearly 300 million people, only 3.5% remain undocumented. Every past wave of immigrants have been vindicated and saluted.
- Stronger border enforcement has not lead to lower undocumented immigration. From 1986 to 1998 the Border Patrol's budget increased six-fold and the number of agents on the southwest border doubled; the undocumented immigrant population doubled as well.
- Immigration restrictions have not contributed to winning the War on Terror. No security expert since 9/11 has said that restrictive immigration measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security have prevented terrorist attacks, nor have the myriad of measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security netted any terrorism prosecutions.

