



Quotes from Catholic Teachings on Migration

The following quotes from various Catholic Social Teaching documents and from Church leaders offer useful input to a parish's educational efforts. They may be of use in parish bulletins and other publications, such as in handouts prepared for formation classes, prayer services, workshops, and retreats.

QUOTES FROM *STRANGERS NO LONGER: A JOURNEY OF HOPE, A PASTORAL LETTER ISSUED BY U.S. AND MEXICO BISHOPS IN JANUARY 2003*

Since its founding, the United States has received immigrants from around the world who have found opportunity and safe haven in a new land. The labor, values, and beliefs of immigrants from throughout the world have transformed the United States from a loose group of colonies into one of the leading democracies in the world today. From its founding to the present, the United States remains a nation of immigrants grounded in the firm belief that newcomers offer new energy, hope, and cultural diversity.

Our common faith in Jesus Christ moves us to search for ways that favor a spirit of solidarity. It is a faith that transcends borders and bids us to overcome all forms of discrimination and violence so that we may build relationships that are just and loving.

As Pope John Paul II wrote in *Ecclesia in America*: In its history, America has experienced many immigrations, as waves of men and women came to its various regions in the hope of a better future. The phenomenon continues even today, especially with many people and families from Latin American countries who have moved to the northern parts of the continent, to the point where in some cases they constitute a substantial part of the population. They often bring with them a cultural and religious heritage which is rich in Christian elements. The Church is well aware of the problems created by this situation and is committed to spare no effort in developing her own pastoral strategy among these immigrant people, in order to help them settle in their new land and to foster a welcoming attitude among the local population, in the belief that a mutual openness will bring enrichment to all. (EA, no. 65)

Catholic teaching has a long and rich tradition in defending the right to migrate. Based on the life and teachings of Jesus, the Church's teaching has provided the basis for the development of basic principles regarding the right to migrate for those attempting to exercise their God-given human rights. Catholic teaching also states that the root causes of migration—poverty, injustice, religious intolerance, and armed conflicts—must be addressed so that migrants can remain in their homeland and support their families.

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Quotes



JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS *a journey of hope*

The whole Church is challenged to live the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-25), as they are converted to be witnesses of the Risen Lord after they welcome him as a stranger. Faith in the presence of Christ in the migrant leads to a conversion of mind and heart, which leads to a renewed spirit of communion and to the building of structures of solidarity to accompany the migrant. Part of the process of conversion of mind and heart deals with confronting attitudes of cultural superiority, indifference, and racism; accepting migrants not as foreboding aliens, terrorists, or economic threats, but rather as persons with dignity and rights, revealing the presence of Christ; and recognizing migrants as bearers of deep cultural values and rich faith traditions. Church leaders at every level are called on to communicate this teaching as well as to provide instruction on the phenomenon of migration, its causes, and its impact throughout the world. This instruction should be grounded in the Scriptures and social teaching.

Conversion of mind and heart leads to communion expressed through hospitality on the part of receiving communities and a sense of belonging and welcome on the part of those in the communities where migrants are arriving. The New Testament often counsels that hospitality is a virtue necessary for all followers of Jesus. Many migrants, sensing rejection or indifference from Catholic communities, have sought solace outside the Church. They experience the sad fate of Jesus, recorded in St. John's Gospel: "He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11). The need to provide hospitality and create a sense of belonging pertains to the Church on every level, as Pope John Paul II said in his annual message on World Migration Day 1993: "The families of migrants . . . should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church."

The building of community with migrants and new immigrants leads to a growing sense of solidarity. The bishop as pastor of the local church should lead the priests, deacons, religious, and faithful in promoting justice and in denouncing injustice towards migrants and immigrants, courageously defending their basic human rights. This should be true in both the sending and receiving churches. As leaven in the society, pastoral agents can be instruments for peace and justice to promote systemic change by making legislators and other government officials aware of what they see in the community. Working closely with other advocates for workers and with non-governmental organizations, the Church can be instrumental in developing initiatives for social change that benefit the most vulnerable members of the community.

In effect, the Church is increasingly called to be "sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (Lumen Gentium, no. 1). The Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico, in communion with the Holy Father in his 1995 World Migration Day message, affirm that in the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere. As a sacrament of unity and thus a sign and a binding force for the whole human race, the Church is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters. It is the task of the various Dioceses actively to ensure that these people, who are obliged to live outside the safety net of civil society, may find a sense of brotherhood in the Christian community. Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble. The Church must, therefore, welcome all persons regardless of race, culture, language, and nation with joy, charity, and hope. It must do so with special care for those who find themselves—regardless of motive—in situations of poverty, marginalization, and exclusion.

**QUOTES FROM *WELCOMING THE STRANGER AMONG US: UNITY IN DIVERSITY,*
A PASTORAL LETTER ISSUED BY THE U.S. BISHOPS IN NOVEMBER 2000**

Diversity of ethnicity, education, and social class challenges us as pastors to welcome these new immigrants and help them join our communities in ways that are respectful of their cultures and in ways that mutually enrich the immigrants and the receiving Church.

The presence of so many people of so many different cultures and religions in so many different parts of the United States has challenged us as a Church to a profound conversion so that we can become truly a sacrament of unity.

The new immigrants call most of us back to our ancestral heritage as descendants of immigrants and to our baptismal heritage as members of the body of Christ.

The presence of brothers and sisters from different cultures should be celebrated as a gift to the Church.

Immigrants, new to our shores, call us out of our unawareness to a conversion of mind and heart through which we are able to offer a genuine and suitable welcome, to share together as brothers and sisters at the same table, and to work side by side to improve the quality of life for society's marginalized members.

The Catholic community is rapidly re-encountering itself as an "immigrant Church," a witness at once to the diversity of people who make up our world and to our unity in one humanity, destined to enjoy the fullness of God's blessing in Jesus Christ.

As Catholics we are called to take concrete measures to overcome the misunderstanding, ignorance, competition, and fear that stand in the way of genuinely welcoming the stranger in our midst and enjoying the communion that is our destiny as Children of God.

The call to solidarity is also a call to promote the effective recognition of the rights of immigrants and to overcome all discrimination based on race, culture, or religion. . .

Immigrants will experience the Church's welcome most personally at the level of the parish. Pastors and parish staff, accordingly, must be filled with a spirit of welcome, responding to a new and perhaps little-understood culture.

The Church of the twenty-first century will be, as it has always been, a Church of many cultures, languages and traditions, yet simultaneously one, as God is one—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—unity in diversity.

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JUSTICE FOR IMMIGRANTS *a journey of hope*

QUOTES FROM CHURCH LEADERS AND OTHER CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Our common dignity as human beings calls us to respect the alien among us, regardless of their status or social position. A preferential love for the poor and disenfranchised is a sure sign of one's Christian identity.

—Most Rev. Robert N. Lynch, Bishop of St. Petersburg, Fla.,
“The Human Story Behind an INS Roundup,”
Origins 26:16 (October 3, 1996): p. 245

In the Old Testament, the Torah teaches that strangers and the homeless in general, inasmuch as they are exposed to all sorts of dangers, deserve special concern from the believer. Indeed, God clearly and repeatedly recommends hospitality and generosity toward the stranger . . . , reminding Israel of how precarious its own existence had once been.

—John Paul II, “Developing Special Concern for the Homeless,”
Origins 26:30 (January 16, 1997): p. 495

This atmosphere of welcoming is increasingly necessary in confronting today's diverse forms of distancing ourselves from others. This is profoundly evidenced in the problem of millions of refugees and exiles, in the phenomenon of racial intolerance as well as intolerance toward the person whose only “fault” is a search for work and better living conditions outside his own country, and in the fear of all who are different and thus seen as a threat.

—John Paul II, “Welcoming the Poor: Reigniting Hope,”
Origins 27:36 (February 26, 1998): p. 605

We shall always insist upon giving a generous welcome to others which is at once a duty of human solidarity and Christian charity. . . . [They should be] welcomed with brotherly love, [with] examples of upright living in which genuine and effective Christian charity and the highest spiritual values are esteemed.

—Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*: On the Development of Peoples
(March 26, 1967), no. 67

In order to build the civilization of love, dialogue between cultures must work to overcome all ethnocentric selfishness and make it possible to combine regard for one's own identity with understanding of others and respect for diversity.

—John Paul II, World Day for Peace Message, January 1, 2001

Dialogue leads to a recognition of diversity and opens the mind to the mutual acceptance and genuine collaboration demanded by the human family's basic vocation to unity.

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Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own state. When there are just reasons in favor for it, he must be permitted to migrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership to the human family, nor of citizenship in the universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men.

—John Paul II, Address to the New World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Immigrants (October 17, 1985)

The local people, moreover, especially public authorities, should all treat [immigrants] not as mere tools of production but as persons, and must help them to arrange for their families to live with them and to provide themselves with decent living quarters.

—Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church
(December 7, 1965), no. 66 (The Documents of Vatican II,
ed. Walter M. Abbott, SJ [Chicago: Follett Publishing Co., 1966])

All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, economic security).

—A Catholic Framework for Economic Life, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops,

The Church has the right, indeed the duty, to proclaim justice on the social, national and international level, and to denounce instances of injustice, when the fundamental rights of man and his very salvation demand it. The Church . . . has a proper and specific responsibility which is identified with her mission of giving witness before the world of the need for love and justice contained in the Gospel message, a witness to be carried out in Church institutions themselves and in the lives of Christians.

—Justice in the World, Statement of the World Synod of Catholic Bishops
(November 30, 1971), no. 36 (Vatican Council II:
More Post-Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery, OP
[Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co., 1982])