

Iowa Catholic Conference
A Statement on Immigration Reform
May 24th, 2006

Updated February 2008

In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)* Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others. He states that love needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community. The Pope recognizes that while the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State, it is the Church's responsibility to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of a just society.

The Iowa Catholic Conference believes that the current debate about illegal immigration in Iowa needs an infusion of the Pope's message about love. The love of God does not stop at national boundaries. Immigrants crossing into the U.S. are in need of the love of neighbor that was commanded by Jesus. That love becomes even more essential for persons who are in the greatest need for expressions of love. Jesus teaches us to welcome the stranger. Immigrants are in need of our kindness and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect because they are created in the image and likeness of God.

The Iowa Catholic Conference recognizes that immigrants contribute many gifts and talents to churches, schools, businesses and communities across the State of Iowa. Immigrants add diversity to our culture, strength to our economy and vitality to our society. They often work hard in low-paying jobs to keep our streets, homes, offices and hotels clean, to toil in our farm fields and food production facilities and to provide an array of services that boost the U.S. economy and allow all of us to maintain a higher standard of living. A recent study by the Iowa Policy Project (IPP) found that undocumented immigrant workers contribute more than \$40 million in taxes in Iowa. Payments for income taxes and social security are automatically withheld from their paychecks even when they do not qualify for many of the tax benefits or government services available to US citizens.

We understand that many Iowans are upset by the large number of undocumented immigrants in our State. However, in many ways, the future well-being of our state depends on the establishment of a safe, legal and orderly path to U.S. citizenship for immigrants so they can continue to contribute to our society and so they may fully participate in our communities. It also requires legislation at the state and local level to create more opportunities for immigrants to overcome barriers to their full participation. Interestingly, a 2007 University of Iowa poll showed that a majority of Iowans favor a comprehensive approach to fixing the broken immigration system, including providing legal status and a path to citizenship to the undocumented.

The Iowa Catholic Conference supports our nation's right to secure its borders. Illegal immigration has created difficulties for people on both sides of our southern border. But efforts to patrol and secure our borders must be balanced with careful attention to protect the human rights of all immigrants. Otherwise, these efforts can create an environment of fear that can lead to the abuse, exploitation and even the death of many immigrants.

Global economic conditions encourage illegal immigration. These global forces include: the growing gap between rich and poor people, the US demand for a cheap source of labor and trade policies that have adversely affected the economy in poor countries. Enforcement policies that discourage illegal immigration, such as building fences and adding security forces to the border, without economic policies to address these root causes, appear to be punitive toward immigrants or perhaps even racially motivated.

The Iowa Catholic Conference joins the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in support of comprehensive immigration reform which includes the following:

- An opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows and, upon satisfaction of some reasonable criteria, to pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
- Reforms in our immigration system to reduce significantly waiting times for separated families who currently experience long delays to be reunited;
- The creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected;
- Border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy.

The Iowa Catholic Conference hopes that our federal and state officials will enact legislation that is in line with these principles. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that it is not the responsibility of the Church to take upon itself the political nature of the battle to bring about the most just society possible. Yet at the same time, the Pope teaches us that the Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. We urge that Iowans – remembering our own history as immigrants -- work constructively towards a compassionate resolution of this problem at the federal level.

Most Rev. Jerome Hanus, OSB, Archbishop of Dubuque
Most Rev. R. Walker Nickless, Bishop of Sioux City
Most Rev. Martin Amos, Bishop of Davenport
Msgr. Stephen Orr, Administrator, Diocese of Des Moines