

# "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me ..."

## *A* PASTORAL LETTER *on the* HUMAN RIGHTS *of* IMMIGRANTS

Bishop Anthony B. Taylor
Diocese of Little Rock
Updated November 2026

*Déle vuelta para leer este documento en español*

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Cover photo: A detained woman sits inside a vehicle surrounded by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis Jan. 21, 2026. (OSV News photo/Leah Millis/Reuters)

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When I came to Arkansas as your bishop in June of 2008, it was in the wake of my having opposed anti-immigrant efforts in Oklahoma that were then being proposed for Arkansas, efforts there that led to harmful legislation that was eventually thrown out by the courts.

To bring our Catholic faith to bear on this threat to human dignity in Arkansas, I issued "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me …a Pastoral Letter on the Human Rights of Immigrants." This letter was issued after the November 2008 elections to make it clear that I was not trying to engage in politics, but rather that this was an exercise of my "munus docendi" — the role and obligation of every bishop to teach the full truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ courageously, in season and out of season. I view this as especially important regarding those Church teachings about which there is confusion or disagreement. And of course, human dignity is a moral issue.

Unfortunately, in the intervening 18 years the situation for immigrants has only gotten worse, and so the time has come for me to re-issue an updated version of that pastoral letter. As with the original, I issue this updated version after the elections, to make it clear that just as with other pro-life issues, while the teaching of the Church can have political implications, my message is not mainly about the politics involved.

I believe that the major current issue about which American Catholics are most confused today has to do with immigration. This is not to say that immigration is the "most important issue" or that American Catholics don't disagree on other fundamental moral teachings of the Church — but, even in those disagreements, there is no doubt or confusion about where the Church stands. With immigration, however, many people simply do not have accurate information, and this is certainly an area where the teaching of the Church is not well known — hence the need for me to teach briefly, but authoritatively, the biblical and theological principles that are the indispensable foundation on which any just and humane approach to immigration must be built. I then apply these principles to the current reality of immigration and immigration law in the United States.

This pastoral letter does not propose specific legislative solutions but does emphasize that the protection of human dignity and human rights should be the starting point for any attempt at immigration reform. For an application of Church teaching to current legislation, please refer to www.justiceforimmigrants.org, the official website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' campaign for immigration reform.

Does Jesus find a warm welcome in our communities? What changes do we need to make here in Arkansas to ensure that today's Marys and Josephs — today's Marías and Josés — receive a warm welcome truly worthy of the Savior whose birth we will celebrate on Christmas in just a few weeks?

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Rev. Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock

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# *"I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me..."*

# *A* PASTORAL LETTER *on the* HUMAN RIGHTS *of* IMMIGRANTS

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

The protection of human rights is a necessary component of our Catholic faith, and you and I are obligated to bring the truths of our faith to bear on the issues of our day. The protection of human rights is also a necessary component of our faithful citizenship as Americans. One of the pressing issues of our day about which our faith has a great deal to offer is that of immigration and specifically the human rights of undocumented immigrants.[1] This is an issue that is very close to my heart and very important to many of the Catholics of Arkansas, and thus it was a worthy topic for my first pastoral letter as bishop of Little Rock back in 2008.

The God of the Bible is a God of immigrants, and the history of salvation unfolds largely in the context of immigration:

■ God called Abraham and Sarah to emigrate from their homeland and led them on a journey that ended with them settling as immigrants in Canaan.

■ Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt and later made arrangements for the immigration of his entire extended family in a time of famine.

■ God called Moses to lead the exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt and made a covenant with them in the desert en route to a new land he had promised them.

■ God later brought his people back to Israel from exile in Babylon, but in the subsequent centuries the Jewish people continued to migrate to cities throughout the ancient world in a diaspora scattered among the nations, sometimes due to poverty or persecution and sometimes in search of better opportunities.[2]

■ In the New Testament, Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth at the time Jesus was conceived but were apparently not citizens of Galilee ("Galilee of the Gentiles") which would explain why they had to go to Bethlehem in Judea for the census. They were refugees in Egypt, having crossed the border without the permission of the government which they were fleeing, and they eventually settled in Galilee once it became apparent that the

[1] The teaching of the Church regarding immigration applies to all immigrants, but in this pastoral letter I will give special attention to the rights of undocumented immigrants and particularly those from Mexico because undocumented Mexican immigrants face greater obstacles and are numerically by far the largest group of immigrants both in Arkansas and in the United States as a whole.

[2] These immigrant Jewish communities of the diaspora later became the first destination of the Apostles and itinerant Christian missionaries of the first century A.D. It was from these communities that the Gospel was first proclaimed throughout the Greek-speaking world.

new government of King Archelaus in Judea was no better than that of his deceased father, King Herod.

Throughout the Bible great emphasis is placed on God's presence among his immigrant people and that we will be judged on our treatment of the alien in our midst.

> *"Come… inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was … a stranger and you welcomed me…" "When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?... "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."... "Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels…(for I was) a stranger and you gave me no welcome… and you did not care for me."... "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me. And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."* [3]



*Honduran migrant Luis Acosta carries 5-year-old Angel Jesus through the Suchiate River near Tapachula, Mexico, Oct. 29, 2018*. (CNS photo/Adrees Latif, Reuters)

**TODAY'S CONTEXT**

Today immigration is usually debated from an economic or political perspective, and each side presents statistical data that they believe supports their position regarding how to deal with the phenomenon of undocumented immigration.[4] I believe that this approach is shortsighted. National borders have almost never prevented demographic shifts of population when there were strong economic reasons for such migration — the law of supply and demand. Therefore, short of taking extreme measures, our only real choice from a historical perspective is how we will manage today's flow. Between 1986 and 2008 the Border Patrol's budget increased over 5,600%, the number of agents quintupled, and border entry points were fortified. During these same years the undocumented immigrant population tripled to at least 12 million, despite the legalization of three million people following the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.

In recent years, spending on immigration enforcement has increased even further. When I first published my letter in 2008, the budget for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was $10.8 billion and the budget for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was $5 billion. By 2026, those numbers have increased to $23.3 billion and $28.1 billion respectively.[5] One indirect reason for this is insufficient legal avenues for immigrants to enter the United States, compared with the number of jobs in need of workers.

Will we take a positive approach that helps newcomers to become full participants in society? Or will we take a negative approach that creates a marginalized underclass and a breeding ground for resentment? Expelling millions of people and closing the door to further immigration are not realistic options, historically, economically or socially. Our only real choice is whether to facilitate an orderly legal process for the common good or to create as much misery as possible — and reap the undesirable consequences.

[3] Mt. 25:34-46.

[4] For statistics dispelling common myths regarding immigration nationally and in Arkansas, see Appendix I. See also justiceforimmigrants.org, the official website of the U.S. bishops' campaign for immigration reform.

[5] https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/fact-sheet/the-cost-of-immigration-enforcement-and-border-security/

There is, unfortunately, a complete disconnect between the economic and social realities that underlie immigration and current U.S. immigration law, which seeks to impede immigration from certain countries rather than facilitate the process.

Most Americans do not realize the impossible barriers placed on people who want to enter our country legally. Do you know that it is virtually impossible for Mexicans to immigrate to the United States legally unless they already have close relatives who are American citizens? Do you know that there is presently up to a 25-year wait for these family reunification visas because no more than 15,820 family-sponsored visas are allotted to Mexican immigrants in any given year?[6] The only exception are spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21. A significant majority of these family sponsored visas are adjustments of status for persons who are already in fact present inside the United States. There are in fact virtually no visas available for the approximately 200,000 immigrants who enter the U.S. unlawfully from Mexico each year or overstay their temporary visa.

The Church claims no special expertise regarding the political, economic and social complexities of the immigration issue, but Catholic social teaching does offer a solid and reliable basis from which to address questions related to our God-given human dignity, the protection of which must be the starting point of any just legal system. We saw this clearly in the civil rights struggle, which was, more properly speaking, a struggle for the protection of the "human" rights of African-American people, not just their "civil" rights.[7]

The second paragraph of the United States Declaration of Independence declares:

> *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these* [8] *are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed…"*

The consent of the governed is more than just the consent of the citizenry — "the governed" includes all who live within the territory governed by that government, independent of their legal status. In the past African-Americans and Native Americans lacked legal status. They were governed without their consent and were deprived of the exercise of their intrinsic human rights. A slave was counted as just three-fifths of a person in the U.S. Constitution and though emancipated after the Civil War, subsequent laws and Supreme Court decisions deprived the freed slaves of their God-given human rights for much of the next 100 years. Native Americans were not counted as persons in the U.S. Constitution and did not all become U.S. citizens until 1924. African-Americans and Native Americans formed part of the voiceless "governed" without whose consent (prior to the Voting Rights Act of 1965) laws were imposed expressly intended to marginalize these sectors of the population. Much progress has been made in race relations during the past 61 years, but we still have a long way to go — the wounds of oppression are deep, as is the consequent alienation. Today a comparable situation is being created by immigration laws

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[6] Currently, the F4 visa category for Mexico (U.S. citizens petitioning for their siblings) is only adjudicating applications from April 2001. This is only the waiting period after the initial application has already been approved, a process that sometimes may take years itself. For more information, please see Appendix II. The information is from: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-bulletin/2026/visa-bulletin-for-september-2026.html.

[7] During the struggle for Civil Rights in the United States, the terms Negro, Colored, and Black were all used at various points rather than today's more usual term African-American. Such earlier identifications that referenced skin color demonstrate that basic human rights were being denied due to race. The shift to a designation such as African-American is an indicator that the protection of civil rights could be secured only after this group had first gained protection for their inalienable human rights. Human rights are the indispensable foundation on which all the rest of the civil rights struggle had to be built.

[8] ...among these: the three inalienable rights listed in this part of the Declaration of Independence do not constitute a taxative list, but most human rights are expressions of these three general categories of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness — as will be seen later in this document.

expressly intended to prevent millions of people from exercising their intrinsic human rights. Will we learn the lessons of history?

## IS IMMIGRATION AN INTRINSIC HUMAN RIGHT?

> *"Human rights were inscribed by the Creator in the order of Creation…(they are not) concessions on the part of human institutions, [or] on the part of states and interna tional organizations…"* [9]

Intrinsic human rights derive from our inherent dignity and transcendence as persons created by God and redeemed by Christ. Even the American Declaration of Independence references a Creator who endowed all with rights that others cannot legitimately deny them. These intrinsic human rights are universal, belonging to all regardless of race, citizenship, culture or gender, and valid for all times and places. They are inherent in the human person and thus inalienable, which means that they do not derive from the state and cannot be taken away by the state or otherwise forfeited. No government has the authority to deprive us of our God-given rights, nor to apply them in a selective or discriminatory manner. When God made humanity responsible for the stewardship of creation, that included caring for others and defending and protecting their rights. Compassion and solidarity with the victims of human rights violations make us more human and more aware of the need to affirm the rights of all. It is part of the daily struggle to make the Kingdom of God present among us.

The United States Declaration of Independence lists three fundamental human rights that are both intrinsic and inalienable: "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Inalienable means that no one can legitimately deprive us of these rights and the reason that they are inalienable is that they are intrinsic, inherent in the human person. It was for the purpose of securing these and other rights that the founders of our nation said they were pledging, "our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor." Of these three inalienable rights, the only one which is absolute is the right to life, to which the Catholic Church continues to give eloquent witness. All other rights, whether inalienable or not, are limited by the common good, to be understood as the shared good of all residents in one's community and nation, and also by extension in the entire human family.[10] This term does not refer to the greater good of any particular group in a society or nation, but to all of its members and the universal good of the entire world.

The right to migrate is not a right per se in the abstract (in any circumstance without restriction) and indeed there are instances where the common good might prevent migration. But there is a right to migrate for those who are exercising their God-given rights and to meet their God-given obligations, for instance when necessary to protect and provide for one's family or to escape persecution.[11]

This right to migrate when necessary has been affirmed right from the beginning of the British colonization of the "new world."[12] It and other rights of immigrants, such as the right to work, are an extension of our intrinsic and inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, as follows:

1. Along with the right to life comes the right of access to the basic necessities of life: food, clothing, shelter, basic medical care, decent em-

[9] St. John Paul II: Crossing the Threshold of Hope, Vittorio Messori: Vatican City (1994), 196-197.

[10] The common good is addressed in detail in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 1905-1927. The extension of the concept of the common good to include all of humanity is addressed by the Catechism in its discussion of human solidarity, paragraphs 1939-1948.

[11] See: St. John Paul II: Address to the New World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Immigrants (October 17, 1985). "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."

[12] English immigrants to Virginia in 1607 and to Massachusetts in 1621 believed they were exercising a God-given right to immigrate, as did the settlers in the other British colonies. There was no limit to the number of immigrants admitted, though there were religious restrictions in some colonies. Unfortunately, these colonists believed it to be a God-given right only for European Christians. Unlike immigrants today, these 17th century settlers made no effort to embrace the local culture. They did not want to assimilate or learn to speak the local languages (Algonquin in Virginia or Wampanoag in Massachusetts).

ployment[13] that pays enough to provide for one's family, etc. With these rights come the obligations to work to meet one's basic needs, as well as the obligation of all — in both poor and wealthy nations — to remedy the global and local economic, social and political ills that deprive people of the basic necessities of life, making migration necessary. Parents are obligated to protect their children and provide for them. If they cannot do so in their place of origin, there comes a point at which they become morally obligated to pursue other options, including migration within their homeland or to another country.

This right to the basic necessities of life is intrinsic to the human person, but it is not unlimited. It comes with responsibilities, including the obligation to work within the system when possible. Unfortunately, for most poor immigrants to the United States today, working within the current system is not possible[14] — which is the reason for this pastoral letter.[15] The right to immigrate is also limited by the common good: the right of others to the basic necessities of life, including those already living in the land to which the immigrants wish to migrate.[16] Recent studies, including that of the President's Council of Economic Advisors, demonstrate that the most recent wave of immigration has produced economic benefits for the United States that outweigh the costs.[17] In any event, both citizens and newcomers have a duty to serve the common good by reaching out to the other.

2. Along with the right to liberty comes the right to religious freedom, the right to one's own identity, regardless of race, religion, gender, legal condition, usefulness to society, health, etc., and the right to participate in the life of a community — a legitimate participation in the exercise of power and an equitable distribution of the goods and services of the community. There should be no second-class residents;[18] the path to citizenship should be straightforward and accessible. The right to liberty is also limited by the common good, including the need to learn the local language (in our case English) and to respect the customs, culture and institutions of the new country and locality in which the immigrants seek to make their home. Research shows that immigrants' English-language proficiency generally improves the longer they live in the United States. This pattern reflects the continuing integration of immigrants into American society. They love America and want to become Americans; that's why they are here.

3. Along with the right to the pursuit of happiness comes the natural right to belong to a family, and the right to the self-actualization of one's person, created in the image and likeness of God, and this includes the right to marriage (limited by the laws of nature), the right to an education and the right to possess property (again limited by the common good, the basic needs of others). The right to belong to a family is gravely

[13] Current immigration laws not only unjustly deny people their right to immigrate when circumstances require, they also use the separate issue of employment authorization — for which many immigrants are not eligible under current law — as a means also to deny them unjustly their right to work to support their families.

[14] The current availability of immigrant visas to the United States is detailed in Appendix II. There is a very long wait for family-sponsored visas due to the interplay between caps on the number of visas by visa category and by country of origin. Nationals who are approved for family-based visas from "oversubscribed" countries like Mexico often must wait for years, even decades, to obtain their visas. The availability of employment-based visas is even more limited. Practically no visas are available for ordinary laborers from Mexico who simply want to come to the United States, work hard and raise their families here. This is especially significant for Arkansas since the largest group of immigrants to our state comes from the "oversubscribed" country of Mexico. The backlog of applicants from Asia, Europe and Africa has created burdensome delays also for these applicants, but with the exception of applicants from the Philippines, the delays are not nearly as long as for Mexicans.

[15] St. Paul VI: 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. "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."

[16] This includes ensuring that the right to decent employment of the existing citizens and residents is protected.

[17] Immigrants are key pillars in fields such as construction, agriculture and higher education. Additionally, they participate in the workforce at a higher rate than native-born Americans and start a disproportionate amount of businesses. While certain age groups, education levels and nationalities tend to cost more tax dollars per capita than their U.S.-born counterparts, this drawback is heavily outweighed by their contributions to the American economy and the disastrous and far-ranging effects of removing their labor and purchasing power from the country via inhumane and unjust deportations. See https://govfacts.org/immigration/immigrations-effect-on-americas-workforce/ for more information.

[18] This obviously applies to all members of society, not just immigrants.

harmed by family separation, both when families are separated by financial necessity in search of employment or by deportation due to immigration enforcement. Strong, healthy families are in everyone's interest and are the foundation of any rightly ordered society.

## WHAT IS THE POINT OF NATIONAL BORDERS?

> *"Man has the right to leave his native land for various motives — and also the right to return — in order to seek better conditions of life in another country."*[19]

Since people have a God-given right to immigrate, what is the point of national borders? Should the border between the United States and Mexico be no different from the border between Arkansas and Oklahoma? Borders, like all human inventions, are at the service of the common good. At present, the common good is best served by wide-open borders between the various states of the United States. It is easy to move to a new state, register to vote and participate in elections shortly thereafter. Demographic shifts occur continually within and among the American states (for instance migration within Arkansas from the depressed Delta region to the booming northwestern parts of the state), and migration between states (for instance from the northern "rust belt" to the southern "sun belt"). These internal migrations are considered normal and they simply respond to the law of supply and demand. Every 10 years the U.S. House of Representatives and state legislatures reapportion the seats and districts to reflect these demographic shifts.

Since that is the case within states and between states, it should be no surprise that the same law of supply and demand produces demographic shifts also on the international level, especially between neighboring countries. This is particularly true in our current era which is characterized by the increasing interdependence of peoples and the rapid movement of capital, goods, and information across borders.

However, national borders are necessary creations designed to create order within and between nations for the benefit of both, to identify the limits of the area in which the governmental and other public institutions of each society are to fulfill their respective responsibilities at the service of the common good.

- to provide for national security and protect the legitimate sovereignty and identity of the state — this includes the right and duty to protect and secure its borders,
- to protect each country from unjust military aggression,
- to prevent crime,
- to foster the economic well-being of each society and both societies,
- to prevent the spread of disease among humans, farm animals and plants,
- to facilitate human movement between nations for the purpose of commerce, tourism, intellectual exchange and immigration.

Above all, borders are an important way to locate, but not limit, state responsibility to safeguard the rights of their members.

The problem with immigration law in many countries, including the United States and Mexico, is that current laws place a disproportionate emphasis on impeding human migration and penalizing people with a legitimate reason to migrate rather than facilitate it for the common good. Mexico itself has laws intended to prevent the entry of Central American immigrants across its southern border. One unintended consequence of unjustly restrictive immigration laws is that when people are forced to circumvent the border to exercise their rights, it becomes easier for others to do so for reasons that are contrary to the common good.

Following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, the U.S. government has tightened its borders dramatically in an attempt to prevent future acts of terrorism, even though none of the 9/11 terrorists entered

[19] St. John Paul II: Laborem Exercens, On Human Work, Vatican City (1981), paragraph 23.

the U.S. illegally from Mexico.[20] In fact, current law has exactly the opposite effect. By creating conditions whereby a flood of good, hard-working people are forced routinely to evade border security, "going around the gate," millions of people enter the country without the government being aware of their presence and the government cannot focus its limited resources on criminals and legitimate security threats. If we seriously want to know who is here, a far better approach would be to have more generous legal immigration policies that allowed honest people to "go through the gate." Their identity could be readily verified and closer attention could then be given to a much smaller group of people who may still be "going around the gate" to evade detection of their criminal activities — for instance, drug smuggling.

## WOULDN'T AMNESTY REWARD THOSE WHO BROKE THE LAW?

> *"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."* [21]

The word "amnesty" is not appropriate. Amnesty is forgiveness of someone who is guilty of a crime. Most undocumented immigrants come to this country in the exercise of their God-given human rights. There was no talk of "amnesty" of those "guilty" of civil disobedience during the lunch counter sit-ins of the civil rights era. They were defending their human rights in obedience to a higher law. In the case of Jim Crow laws, it was the law itself that was criminal in the eyes of God, not those who disobeyed it.

Rather than focus on those who are forced to break the law in order to provide for the basic needs of their families, we should focus instead on fixing the broken laws themselves: broken in the sense that they do not work and cannot work because they impede rather than facilitate the exercise of the God-given rights of migrants. Rather than "amnesty," what we should extend to the immigrants in our midst is "welcome." [22]

## BUT THE LAW IS THE LAW!

> *"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but to God what belongs to God."* [23]

There are those who worry that by remedying our current unjust immigration laws we will be in effect legitimizing the actions of all those who crossed the border illegally, creating disrespect for the rule of law in the present and a bad precedent for the future. This is the same argument that was lodged against those who "disrespected" the Jim Crow laws of the U.S. South. Who did more harm to the rule of law in our country, those who enacted the Jim Crow laws or those who broke the unjust laws? How many streets do we have named after Martin Luther King Jr. and how many named after Jim Crow, whose unjust laws Dr. King defied? There is nothing sacred about the law in itself —"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mk 2:27) The law is sacred only insofar as it is rooted in truth and justice, and only insofar as it is in the service of the common good. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson

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[20] Most of the 9/11 terrorists had legal visas and none entered the U.S. across our southern border. The Canadian border is the only border across which terrorists have been known to try to enter the United States with explosives, but very few are proposing to build a fence the length of the U.S.-Canadian border. Some post 9/11 measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security have had the opposite effect and made us less safe, as targeted communities of immigrants are afraid to come forward with information.

[21] St. John Paul II, "Welcoming the Poor: Reigniting Hope," Origins 27:36 (February 26, 1998): p. 605.

[22] See "Justice for Immigrants: Immigration Reform and the Church," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2026. The USCCB recognizes the numerous deficiencies in the current immigration system and the need for wide-ranging reform to better meet the needs of migrants and the nation. A brief history of the current system can be found in the website, as well as recommendations for a more humane, just, and efficient system, one that meets the standards of Catholic social teaching and addresses the realities of immigration in this country. https://justiceforimmigrants.org/learn/immigration-reform-and-the-church/

[23] Mt 22:21.

disobeyed England's unjust laws and demanded protection for inalienable rights that came from God and not from King George III. Jesus clarified this higher law when he said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but to God what belongs to God."

## ISN'T ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION A BAD THING?

> "*Civil law must ensure that all members of society enjoy respect for certain fundamental rights which innately belong to the person, rights which every positive law must recognize and guarantee. Thus any government which refused to recognize human rights or acted in violation of them would not only fail in its duty; its decrees would be wholly lacking in binding force.*" [24]

Yes, illegal immigration is a bad thing. A very bad thing. It is very harmful to the immigrants and to a lesser degree it is harmful to our country as well. Here it would be useful to recall the distinction between "civil" infractions (undocumented presence, for instance overstaying a valid visa) and "criminal" infractions (for instance, unlawful entry).[25] An unintended consequence of current U.S. immigration law is that when the children of undocumented immigrants hear their good, honest parents described as "illegal," or worse as "criminals," the whole concept of illegality or criminality is diminished, making genuine criminal acts seem less serious as well. Moreover, people become afraid to report other crimes to the police or even to seek the help of the police when they are victimized (for instance, in situations of domestic violence) because they fear that the police might arrest them instead due to their immigration status. This makes the work of the police much more difficult because they need the support of the community in order to be effective in combating crime.

Unfortunately, U.S. immigration law provides people with unworkable alternatives in the exercise of their basic human right to immigrate.[26] Is this a case of the ends justifying the means or the lesser of two evils — neither of which is morally admissible? No, because the act of immigration in the exercise of one's intrinsic human rights is justifiable and not evil even when it involves the infraction of a law that is itself unjust. The solution to illegal immigration is not to make immigration even more difficult and perilous, but rather to remove the causes of illegal immigration, as follows:

■ Reform current pathways and their restrictions to better facilitate legal immigration and enact immigration policies that better reflect the economic realities that underlie most migration. More generous legal immigration policies will enable us to better monitor the specific persons entering the country and better protect people from those criminal elements that exploit immigrants.

■ Work to remedy the international inequality of wealth and economic development, especially in migrant countries of origin. People leave home largely because they must, in order to protect and provide for their families.

■ Create a system that welcomes immigrants, facilitates their adaptation to life in the United States, and provides an accessible, achievable path to citizenship.

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[24] St. John Paul II: Evangelium Vitae, The Gospel of Life, Vatican City (1995), paragraph 71.
[25] See Appendix I, item 4.
[26] For an explanation of why legal immigration is impossible for most people, see Appendix II.



*The wall at the U.S.-Mexico border is seen in the background as migrants from South and Central America look to surrender to immigration officials in Ruby, Ariz., June 24, 2024, after crossing into the United States from Mexico.* (OSV News photo/Adrees Latif, Reuters)

## CONCLUSION

> *"You shall not oppress a resident alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were oncealiens yourselves in the land of Egypt."*[27]

One of the constant features of American history is the fact of immigration and the process of conversion whereby the receiving population learns to soften its heart and open its arms to welcome the newcomer. As we have seen with the earlier waves of Irish, German, Italian and Eastern European immigrants, this process takes time — time for the immigrants to integrate and time for the receiving population to become comfortable with the newcomers. The ancestors of today's Americans faced and overcame many of the same obstacles that now confront today's immigrants. We are astonished today to read of the mean-spiritedness of the "Irish need not apply" signs that greeted the Irish Catholic immigrants of the 1800s. But we are also edified by the poem by Emma Lazarus on the Statue of Liberty which concludes with the words:

> *"Give me your tired, your poor,*
> *Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*
> *The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*
> *Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,*
> *I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

One of the most distinguishing features of the Catholic Church is that we are called to be "universal" in fact as well as in name. This means that there must be no dividing lines within our parishes, no second-class parishioners — all are welcome, without exception. In many instances, this will require a process of conversion within our own hearts as well as within our parish communities and I know that it sometimes takes time to adjust when encountering a new group of people, but it is precisely to this that Jesus calls us, one and all. In this, Jesus will use us to be a light to our nation, a model for what all of American society is called to be.

[27] Exodus 23:9.

## WHAT DO THE POPES SAY?

### Pope St. John Paul II

*"It is important to help illegal migrants to complete the necessary administrative papers to obtain a residence permit. Social and charitable institutions can make contact with the authorities in order to seek appropriate, lawful solutions to various cases. This kind of effort should be made especially on behalf of those who, after a long stay, are so deeply rooted in the local society that returning to their country of origin would be tantamount to a form of reverse emigration, with serious consequences particularly for the children."*

*Message of Pope St. John Paul II for World Migration Day, 1996, n. 3*

### Pope Benedict XVI

*"We can say that we are facing a social phenomenon of epoch-making proportions that requires bold, forward-looking policies of international cooperation if it is to be handled effectively. Such policies should set out from close collaboration between the migrants' countries of origin and their countries of destination; it should be accompanied by adequate international norms able to coordinate different legislative systems with a view to safeguarding the needs and rights of individual migrants and their families, and at the same time, those of the host countries. No country can be expected to address today's problems of migration by itself. We are all witnesses of the burden of suffering, the dislocation and the aspirations that accompany the flow of migrants. The phenomenon, as everyone knows, is difficult to manage; but there is no doubt that foreign workers, despite any difficulties concerning integration, make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country through their labor, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the money they send home. Obviously, these laborers cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.*"

*Caritas in Veritate, 2009, n.62*

### Pope Francis

*"The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality. At the same time, one must recognize the right of a nation to defend itself and keep communities safe from those who have committed violent or serious crimes while in the country or prior to arrival. That said, the act of deporting people who in many cases have left their own land for reasons of extreme poverty, insecurity, exploitation, persecution or serious deterioration of the environment, damages the dignity of many men and women, and of entire families, and places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness.*

*"This is not a minor issue: an authentic rule of law is verified precisely in the dignified treatment that all people deserve, especially the poorest and most marginalized. The true common good is promoted when society and government, with creativity and strict respect for the rights of all — as I have affirmed on numerous occasions — welcomes, protects, promotes, and integrates the most fragile, unprotected and vulnerable. This does not impede the development of a policy that regulates orderly and legal migration. However, this development cannot come about through the privilege of some and the sacrifice of others. What is built on the basis of force, and not on the truth about the equal dignity of every human being, begins badly and will end badly."*

*Letter of the Holy Father to the Bishops of the United States of America, 2025, n. 4*

**Pope Leo XIV**

*"A litmus test for social justice today is the treatment of migrants, refugees and those forced to move due to poverty, violence, climate change and environmental disasters. The way a society treats them reveals whether its sense of justice is driven by fear or by the spirit of fraternity. Pope Francis urged us to see migrants not simply as a problem to be managed, but as a living image of the People of God on the move. They are people with dignity, resources and dreams, who have the right to be treated with respect and to ask to become active members of the societies that welcome them. Social justice in this area entails at least two complementary commitments. On the one hand, this means protecting the rightful hopes of those forced to leave by ensuring safe and legal routes, dignified conditions for receiving them, and genuine pathways to integration. On the other hand, it means promoting the right to remain in one's homeland in peace and security by addressing the root causes that force people to migrate, including those linked to economic injustices and the climate crisis. When these rights are respected, migration can become an opportunity for encounter and mutual enrichment among peoples."*

*Magnifica Humanitas, 2026, n. 81*



*A child embraces her father after a hearing at a U.S. immigration court in the Manhattan borough of New York City July 22, 2025.* (OSV News photo/David "Dee" Delgado, Reuters)

## Appendix I: Fact Sheet Regarding Immigration

**1. TAXES and PUBLIC BENEFITS:** Undocumented immigrants pay over $96.7 billion a year in taxes. Around $59.4 billion are federal taxes, and $37.3 billion are paid to the states through sales, excise, property and various other categories of taxes.[28] In 2022, undocumented immigrants paid $25.7 billion in social security taxes, $6.4 billion in Medicare taxes and $1.8 billion in unemployment insurance taxes.[29] These contributions benefit U.S. citizens but not undocumented workers who cannot claim these public benefits.[30] Immigrant workforce participation is consistently higher than native-born; in 2023, despite making up only 13-14% of the total population, they accounted for 19% of the workforce.[31] They come here to work and raise their families.

**In Arkansas:**
Undocumented immigrants paid $188.2 million in taxes in 2023, and this figure would most likely rise if they were granted legal status. Removing status-related difficulties in complying with tax laws, in addition to improved access to higher education and higher-paying jobs, could lead to over $30 million extra, for a total of $223 million.[32]

**2. FAMILY VALUES**: Immigrants are much more likely than native-born families to raise their children in two-parent households. 82.6% of children with one or more immigrant parents live with both parents, compared to only 69.5% of children with two native-born parents. Additionally, children of immigrants are more often raised in married households (77.9%) than children of two native-born citizens (65.0%).[33] Immigrants spend most of their income here to support themselves and their families. The billions of dollars they send to their home countries is one of the most targeted and effective forms of direct foreign investment[34] — reducing instability in those countries[35] and promoting economic growth, especially in the poorest regions, that will enable them to provide better for their citizens and eventually remove the need for future immigration. Immigrants had an estimated income of $466.5 billion in 2024. About 17% of that income was sent home to families abroad, saved or used for interest payments. The remaining 83% stayed in the state's economy.[36]

**3. EFFECT ON THE ECONOMY:** Roughly 75% of immigrants arrive at prime working age, most often in their early to mid-30s, according to the Center for Immigration Studies in 2021. The United States does not invest a penny on their education, yet they are transferred directly to our workforce and contribute $2.2 trillion to our economy every year through their labor, tax payments, and everyday spending.[37] Additionally, immigrants create jobs for citizens, not only through increased demand for services, but also by starting businesses. Americans rely heavily on immigrant-founded businesses, from local shops to giants such as Google. Immigrants have an outsized economic impact; they are twice as likely as native-born Americans to found businesses of all sizes, leading the way in job creation.[38]

**In Arkansas:**
■ While immigrants account for about 5% of the population, they compose 7% of the workforce and 8% of the self-employed workforce.[39]

[28] Source: https://forumtogether.org/article/undocumented-immigrants-are-integral-to-our-nation/
[29] Source: https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/
[30] When Congress passed H.R.1 in 2025 (commonly called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act), it became unlawful for even some documented immigrants, such as those admitted with refugee status, to access many public benefits, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, Medicare and the Child Health Insurance program. Such limitations had already been applied to the vast majority of undocumented immigrants for decades.
[31] Source: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/21/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/
[32] Source: https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/
[33] https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/02/over-quarter-of-children-lived-with-at-least-one-foreign-born-parent.html
[34] Source: https://www.ifad.org/en/w/explainers/8-reasons-remittances-matter-more-than-ever
[35] Another seldom noted fact is that both immigration and the money these immigrants send back to their home countries serve as a very important "safety valve" without which these countries could become very unstable. The U.S.-Mexico border historically has been a remarkably peaceful border, but can you imagine what a hostile Mexico or a Mexico in turmoil would mean for the safety and security of the United States? The immigration of 12 million Mexicans over the last few decades has not only benefited the United States economically, it has also served to create a more stable Mexico and thus a more secure United States.
[36] Source: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4740925
[37] Source: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4740925
[38] Source: https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/immigrants-to-the-u-s-create-more-jobs-than-they-take
[39] Source: https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/immigrants_in_arkansas.pdf?bcs-agent-scanner=079992d5-56d7-2c4b-ac7a-d588d005de95

■ Immigrants also provide outsized shares of vital professions such as STEM education, construction, and manufacturing (24%, 14% and 14%, respectively).[40]

■ Immigrants add $3.1 billion to the state's economy in after-tax income.[41]

■ Immigrants pay $389.7 million in state taxes, including $69.1 million from undocumented immigrants.[42]

■ 12,843 immigrant business owners accounted for 8% of all self-employed Arkansas residents in 2018 and generated $282.9 million in business income.[43]

■ The education of immigrant children is an investment in Arkansas' future workforce. If given the opportunity, many will go to college and further the economic progress their parents have started.[44]

4. **TODAY'S IMMIGRANTS COMPARED TO THE PAST**: Today about 15% of the U.S. population is foreign-born, about the same as 100 years ago. In those days immigrants settled in mono-ethnic neighborhoods, spoke their own languages, faced discrimination and integrated within American culture at a similar rate.[45] About half of all immigrants speak English at home or proficiently.[46] The demand for English classes far outstrips what is currently offered, indicating a strong desire to integrate.[47] The fact that 91% of children of immigrants speak English, and that many speak only English (31% of second-generation and 66% of third-generation children), further supports this conclusion.[48] [49]

**In Arkansas:**
Sixty-one percent of all Arkansas' 158,000 foreign born residents in 2023 were from Latin America (seven out of 10 from Mexico, three out of 10 from other countries).[50] Benton, Washington, Sebastian and Pulaski counties were home to 67% of Arkansas' immigrants.[51] Thirty-six percent of children in immigrant families are uninsured compared to 7% of native-born children.[52]

5. **UNLAWFUL ENTRY VS. UNLAWFUL PRESENCE:** In the confusing and most often contrary way that immigration law deals with unauthorized presence in the United States, how one entered the country is most important. For example, two immigrants, one who entered with a visitor visa but overstayed and one who entered without a visa will be treated differently based on how they entered the country, even though both are here without status.

The person who entered the country with a valid visa has committed no crime in failing to leave when his visa has expired. Unlawful presence is not a violation of the U.S. criminal code. It is a civil infraction, not a criminal infraction. He cannot be sent to jail for overstaying even though he is an undocumented immigrant. However, he is in violation of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) and the federal government can impose a civil penalty for this violation, meaning they can deport him. About 40% of undocumented immigrants fall under this category. [53]

For the person who entered the country without a valid visa, the situation is much different. He has violated the U.S. criminal code by entering unlawfully or without permission. The government can punish him for this action by imposing a fine of between $50 and $250 and/or a maximum of six months in jail as well as deport him.

This difference in how these immigrants are treated is compounded by the family-based visa situation. Once a petition is filed for a family member to receive a

[40] Ibid, p. 3-4
[41] Ibid, p. 4
[42] Ibid, p. 3
[43] Ibid, p. 4-5
[44] See footnote 39; and A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas, Volume 1: Immigrant Workers, Families, and Their Children, Capps, Henderson, Kasarda, Johnson, Appold, Croney, Hernández and Fix (Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, 2007), p. 64.
[45] Source: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/08/21/key-findings-about-us-immigrants/
[46] Ibid
[47] Source: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/press-release/new-report-maps-vulnerabilities-state-federal-government-seeks-eliminate-funding
[48] Source: https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/10/22/key-facts-about-us-latinos/
[49] Source: https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2023/09/20/latinos-views-of-and-experiences-with-the-spanish-language/
[50] Source: https://www.immigrantmap.us/immigrant-population/arkansas/#t=region&rstate=AR
[51] Source: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data-tool/us-immigrant-population-state-county
[52] Source: https://www.immigrantmap.us/immigrant-population/arkansas/#t=region&rstate=AR
[53] Source: https://www.statista.com/chart/16701/visa-overstays-outnumber-illegal-crossings/

family-based visa, they are not likely to receive a visa to visit the U.S. So, for example, a father from Mexico who is a legal permanent resident in the United States files for a family-based petition for his wife and daughter. He will wait more than seven years for their visa to become available. During that time they will usually be unable to receive a visitor visa to visit him in the U.S. because they won't be able to meet the "intent" requirement of the visitor visa. Persons applying for a visitor visa must prove that they intend to be in the U.S. temporarily, which by virtue of having a family-based petition to immigrate to the U.S. they cannot prove. So during this time when the family is pending processing, the only way for the family to be together is for the father to travel to Mexico.

**6. FALSE DOCUMENTS.** Just as Sir Walter Scott said, "Oh what a tangled web we weave when we first practice to deceive," we could say regarding immigration law, "Oh what a tangled mess when first we start to oppress." The law of supply and demand still applies, but like rivers find a way to work around sandbars and other obstacles, so also employers and employees will work around oppressive restrictions when there is no other alternative. Once again, we can assist people in exercising their right to work to earn a living or we can try to create as much misery as possible.[54]

Employers in Arkansas are now required to verify the Social Security numbers their employees must provide them, but when suitable employees are scarce, they have no incentive to ask too many questions of employees they doubt have valid documentation. Employees are required to present a Social Security card to their employers as a condition for employment, but undocumented immigrants cannot obtain a valid Social Security number in their own name, so in order to exercise their right to work and provide for their family, they find it necessary to use a false Social Security number.

■ Sometimes these are valid numbers issued to family members or friends and borrowed by the employee, who may be known at work by that other name.

■ Sometimes these are forged Social Security cards with numbers not assigned to anyone by the Social Security Administration. These forged cards are marketed by criminal elements that prey on immigrants, who often first learn that their card is "bad" when notified by their employer.

■ Sometimes, these Social Security numbers are the result of identity theft and marketed by criminal elements as "good" numbers. Because these are valid numbers, they can escape detection longer, but usually the worker is completely unaware of the fact that his Social Security number is the result of the identity theft. His only "crime" was wanting to work to support his family.

[54] Three Kansan bishops issued a letter on August 14, 2025, urging the Department of Homeland Security to reconsider the use of worksite enforcement raids as an immigration enforcement tool. The bishops decry the humanitarian costs of these raids, stating that they are immeasurable and unacceptable to use against otherwise law-abiding workers in a civilized society.

## Appendix II: Current Availability of Immigrant Visas to the U.S.

The best way to understand the woefully inadequate supply of immigrant visas to the U.S. is to study the official publications of the U.S. Department of State, including the monthly Visa Bulletin, which can be found at travel.state.gov. The sections of the Visa Bulletin for September 2026 relating to family-based and employment-based visas are provided and commented on below — the footnotes are not part of the bulletin. Every month the priority dates reached may (or may not) change, but the basic reality does not. There is a very long and growing wait for family-sponsored visas due to the interplay between caps on the number of visas by visa category and by country of origin. Nationals who are applying for family-based visas from "oversubscribed" countries like Mexico often must wait for years, even decades, for their visa to become available. The availability of employment-based visas is even more limited. Practically no visas are available for ordinary laborers from Mexico who simply want to come to the United States, work hard and raise their family here.

This appendix mainly focuses on family-based immigration with some information on employment-based immigration. Family-based immigration remains the main path to lawful immigration both for those outside of the United States wishing to enter and for those already inside the country who wish to adjust status. Immediate relatives of United States citizens (defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act as the spouses, parents, and unmarried children under the age of 21) are not subject to the same waiting times that other applicants undergo, meaning that they might immigrate relatively quickly.[55] U.S. citizens petitioning for other family members and Lawful Permanent Residents who petition for their family members are required to wait for many years or even decades for their family members to enter the United States. Non-familial immigration has become increasingly difficult in recent years. For example, refugee admissions have been greatly reduced by the current political administration to the lowest they have ever been since the Refugee Act of 1980, making it virtually impossible to lawfully immigrate without a petition by either a U.S. family member or employer.[56]

**VISA BULLETIN FOR SEPTEMBER 2026**

Source: U.S. Department of State, Visa Bulletin for September 2026, Volume XI, Number 18.

**A. STATUTORY NUMBERS FOR PREFERENCE IMMIGRANT VISAS**

The fiscal year 2026 limit for family-sponsored preference immigrants determined in accordance with Section 201 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) is 226,000. The worldwide level for annual employment-based preference immigrants is 186,317. Section 202 prescribes that the per-country limit for preference immigrants is set at 7% of the total annual family-sponsored and employment-based preference limits, i.e., 28,862. The dependent area limit is set at 2%, or 8,247.[57]

Section 203(a) of the INA prescribes preference classes for allotment of Family-sponsored immigrant visas as follows:

**FAMILY-SPONSORED PREFERENCES**

**First**: Unmarried Sons and Daughters of Citizens: 23,400 plus any numbers not required for fourth preference. *Current approximate backlog: Mexico: 19 years*; *Philippines: 13 years*; *All other countries: 7 years.*[58]

[55] The speed of the process varies greatly based on the political climate at the time of application. For example, shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic, processing times were much longer than usual due to the backlogs brought about by increased travel restrictions. In 2023 and 2024, it was not uncommon for the same applications for lawful permanent residence to merely take six months to process. Given the current hostilities toward immigration, the processing times have slowed again. The Department of Homeland Security currently advertises an estimated wait time of 24 months for a petition by a U.S. citizen on behalf of an immediate relative.

[56] For more information on refugee admissions, see the State Department's report on refugee admissions at https://www.rpc.state.gov/admissions-and-arrivals/

[57] This means that only 28,862 people can immigrate lawfully from Mexico, or any other single country, to the United States per year. According to a 2025 report by CBP on visa overstays, 79,443 Mexican nationals are estimated to have overstayed their nonimmigrant visas in 2023, well over double the allotted number of family-based immigration visas granted per year. Also, CBP has reported an average of approximately 30,000 border encounters per month throughout the current administration's historically low border encounters. All this shows that even with current tactics in place to scare potential immigrants away from circumventing the visa process, the need to immigrate is simply too high for our current system to accommodate.

[58] Of the 226,000 worldwide family-sponsored immigrants per year, 23,400 visas are allotted to the unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens. The current approximate backlogs used throughout this letter are not part of the original document. They are calculated by subtracting the dates on the visa bulletin from the present.

**Second**: Spouses and Children, and Unmarried Sons and Daughters of Permanent Residents: 114,200, plus the number (if any) by which the worldwide family preference level exceeds 226,000, and any unused first preference numbers:

A. Spouses and Children: 77% of the overall second preference limitation, of which 75 percent are exempt from the per-country limit; *Current approximate backlog: Mexico: 1 year*; *All other countries: Current*. [59]

B. Unmarried Sons and Daughters (21 years of age or older): 23% of the overall second preference limitation. *Current approximate backlog: Mexico: 18 years*; *Philippines: 13 years; All other countries: 7 years*. [60]

**Third:** Married Sons and Daughters of Citizens: 23,400, plus any numbers not required by first and second preferences. *Current approximate backlog: Mexico: 25 years*; *Philippines: 21 years*; *All other countries: 12 years.* [61]

**Fourth**: Brothers and Sisters of Adult Citizens: 65,000, plus any numbers not required by first three preferences. *Current approximate backlog: Mexico: 25 years*; *Philippines: 19 years*; *All other countries: 15 years.* [62]

**A. FINAL ACTION DATES FOR FAMILY-SPONSORED PREFERENCE CASES**

In the following chart, the listing of a date for any class indicates that the class is oversubscribed.

**NOTE:** For September, F2A numbers **EXEMPT from per-country limit** are authorized for issuance to applicants from all countries with priority dates **earlier** than 22AUG25. F2A numbers **SUBJECT to per-country limit** are authorized for issuance to applicants chargeable to all countries **EXCEPT MEXICO,** with priority dates beginning 22AUG25 and earlier than 22AUG26. All F2A numbers provided for MEXICO are exempt from the per-country limit.

5. Section 203(b) of the INA prescribes preference classes for allotment of Employment-based immigrant visas as follows:

**EMPLOYMENT-BASED PREFERENCES**

*Although employment-based immigration has a much shorter backlog than family-based, there still is a backlog of approximately 4 years for third and fourth category visas. Also, India and China both have backlogs in all categories, the longest being approximately 13 years for third category visas chargeable to India. Finally, the second and fifth categories chargeable to India are currently unavailable.*[63]

**First:** Priority Workers: 28.6% of the worldwide employment-based preference level, plus any numbers not required for fourth and fifth preferences.

**Second**: Members of the Professions Holding Advanced Degrees or Persons of Exceptional Ability: 28.6% of the worldwide employment-based preference level, plus any numbers not required by first preference.

**Third**: Skilled Workers, Professionals, and Other Workers: 28.6% of the worldwide level, plus any numbers not required by first and second preferences, not more than 10,000 of which to "Other Workers."

**Fourth**: Certain Special Immigrants: 7.1% of the worldwide level.

| Family Sponsored | All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed | CHINA - mainland born | INDIA | MEXICO | PHILIPPINES |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| F1 | 22JAN20 | 22JAN20 | 22JAN20 | 01JAN08 | 01MAY13 |
| F2A | 22AUG26 | 22AUG26 | 22AUG26 | 22AUG25 | 22AUG26 |
| F2B | 22AUG19 | 22AUG19 | 22AUG19 | 15FEB09 | 01JUN13 |
| F3 | 22OCT14 | 22OCT14 | 22OCT14 | 01JUL01 | 22FEB06 |
| F4 | 22OCT11 | 22OCT11 | 01NOV06 | 08APR01 | 22AUG07 |

[59] Only 87,934 visas per year (77% of the 114,200 "second preference" visas, Category 2A above) worldwide are allotted to the spouses and children (under the age of 21) of permanent residents and 75% of these 65,951 are exempted from the 25,620 per country limit.

[60] Only 26,266 visas per year (23% of the 114,200 "second preference" visas, Category 2b above) worldwide are allotted to the unmarried sons and daughters (over the age of 21) of permanent residents.

[61] Only 23,400 visas per year worldwide are allotted to the married sons and daughters of U.S. citizens.

[62] Only 65,000 visas per year worldwide are allotted to the brothers and sisters of adult U.S. citizens.

[63] This does not affect nonimmigrant employment visas such as the R-1 Nonimmigrant Religious Workers visa, which allows for priests from dioceses outside of the country to reside in the United States for a period of up to five years.

**Fifth**: Employment Creation: 7.1% of the worldwide level, of which 32% are reserved as follows: 20% reserved for qualified immigrants who invest in a rural area; 10% reserved for qualified immigrants who invest in a high unemployment area; and 2% reserved for qualified immigrants who invest in infrastructure projects. The remaining 68% are unreserved and are allotted for all other qualified immigrants.

**B. DIVERSITY IMMIGRANT (DV) CATEGORY FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER**

Section 203(c) of the INA provides up to 55,000 immigrant visas each fiscal year to permit additional immigration opportunities for persons from countries with low admissions during the previous five years.

Department of State Publication 9514

CA/VO: August 10, 2026

*For an up-to-date version of the visa bulletin as well as information on additional immigration categories, please visit the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at travel.state.gov.*

## Appendix III: Catholic Elements of Immigration Reform[64]

"What is clearly true, and what the Church and many others have called for, is the urgent need for a comprehensive reform of our country's immigration system. The U.S. immigration system is overly complex and unjust, often keeping family members apart; it must be fixed." — Statement of the USCCB Administrative Committee (March 17, 2022)

For decades, the Catholic bishops of the United States have been consistent and steadfast in their calls for a just reform of the nation's immigration system. The elements of reform articulated below are grounded in Catholic social teaching generally and the Church's teaching on migration specifically, including the joint pastoral letter released by the American and Mexican bishops, Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope (2003).

**Element 1**: Enforcement efforts should be targeted, proportional, and humane. Safeguarding American communities and upholding the rule of law are laudable goals. At the same time, a country's rights to regulate its borders and enforce its immigration laws must be balanced with its responsibilities to uphold the sanctity of human life, respect the God-given dignity of all persons, and enact policies that further the common good. Whether along an international border or in the interior of the country, enforcement measures should focus on those who present genuine risks and dangers to society, particularly efforts to reduce gang activity, stem the flow of drugs, and end human trafficking. Just enforcement also requires limiting the use of detention, especially for families, children, pregnant women, the sick, elderly, and disabled, given its proven harms and the pervasive lack of appropriate care in detention settings. Military personnel, resources, and tactics should not be used in immigration enforcement. Deportations and other enforcement actions should always be carried out with due regard for families, community ties, and religious liberty interests.

**Element 2:** Humanitarian protections and due process should be ensured. From refugee resettlement, asylum, and temporary protected status, to visas for victims of trafficking and abused youth, humanitarian protections are essential components of an immigration system that furthers the common good. Reforms to the U.S. asylum system in particular should not raise what is already a high bar for relief, given the potential threats to human life if refoulement were to occur. Meanwhile, third-country resettlement is a durable and mutually beneficial solution for refugees who cannot safely return to their country of origin. Immigration processes, whether affirmative or defensive, must also be subject to due process. The dehumanization or vilification of noncitizens as a means to deprive them of protection under the law is not only contrary to the rule of law but an affront to God himself, who has created them in his own image. Further restricting access to humanitarian protections will only endanger those who are most vulnerable and deserving of relief.

**Element 3**: Long-time residents should have an earned pathway to citizenship. History does not support the belief that opportunities for long-time undocumented residents to regularize their status significantly increases illegal immigration. Today, nearly 12 million people are estimated to be living in the United States without legal status. This number has remained be-

[64] This Appendix III is taken in its entirety from the 2025 document, Catholic Elements of Immigration Reform, published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: https://www.usccb.org/resources/immigrationreform.pdf

tween 10 and 12 million since 2005. Almost one-third of the undocumented population consists of those brought to the United States as children, commonly known as "Dreamers". It also includes approximately 300,000 farmworkers, about half of the U.S. agricultural workforce. A significant majority of the undocumented population has lived in the United States for over a decade (some estimates place this percentage at upwards of 80%). Meanwhile, the population already contributes an estimated $100 billion in federal, state, and local taxes each year. Providing legal processes for long-time residents and other undocumented immigrants to regularize their status would strengthen the American economy, provide stability to communities, and keep families together.

**Element 4:** Family unity should remain a cornerstone of the U.S. system. Catholic teaching maintains that families are the foundation of society, and the success of any civilization hinges on the well-being of its families. For generations, families living in the United States have included combinations of citizens and noncitizens. Immigration reform measures should be evaluated according to whether they strengthen families and promote family unity. U.S. citizen members of mixed-status families should not be penalized with restrictive policies that require eligibility for programs or services to hinge on an entire family being comprised of citizens.

**Element 5**: Legal pathways should be expanded, reliable, and efficient. An enforcement-only approach to immigration disregards the benefits of immigration and the contributions of immigrants, as well as the many legitimate motivations people have for migrating, including family reunification, educational opportunities, employment, and humanitarian needs. Meanwhile, limits on legal immigration pathways established several decades ago are no longer responsive to the social, economic, and geopolitical realities of today. Unreliable processes and inadequate legal pathways have merely contributed to an increase in irregular migration, even as enforcement efforts have been steadily intensified. Improving and increasing opportunities for people to lawfully enter the United States, on both a temporary and permanent basis, are necessary steps to address several pressing issues, from family separation to regional labor shortages. New legal pathways should be created, and backlogs resulting in decades-long wait times should be eliminated.

**Element 6:** The root causes of forced migration should be addressed. Migration has been a consistent phenomenon throughout human history. The Bible itself depicts a series of migrations, including that of the Holy Family fleeing persecution. An effective and sustainable response to increased migration must include efforts to address its root causes, especially in the case of forced migration. The preeminent right to life provides that people should be able to flourish in their homeland, with migration being a free choice (known in Catholic teaching as the right not to migrate). However, when the conditions for a dignified life are absent, people have the natural right to migrate, and countries have a duty to accommodate that right to the extent possible. There are a multitude of factors causing people around the world to migrate in large numbers today, often as the only way to sustain or protect human life. This cannot be addressed unilaterally (i.e., a domestic overemphasis on deterrence) or by shifting responsibility (i.e., externalization of borders) but requires meaningful cooperation between the United States and other countries.

## Appendix IV: Study Guide

The study guide for "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" is available online. The study guide contains videos, discussion questions and sample plans for organizing a small group study in your parish, in your family and with your friends. To view the study guide, go to dolr.org/bishop/i-was-a-stranger/study.