**Immigration and Refugee Crises – What’s a Catholic to Think?**

**Part II of a series: FAQs about Immigrants**

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*Why do immigrants come to the United States? Why don’t some immigrants come here legally?*

One of the primary reasons certain immigrants come to the United States in an undocumented manner is due to the many systemic barriers of our current broken immigration system. Immigrants arrive undocumented because there is an enormous wait or “visa backlog” that prevents them from reunifying with family members currently living in the United States in a timely fashion. Depending on the country of origin, some family members might have to wait for more than a decade before their visa is processed and for family reunification to occur. Some immigrants arrive at our borders because they are fleeing persecution and seeking protection and cannot safely live in their home countries. Most recently we have seen this in the case of the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, which have some of the highest murder and crime rates in the world. Lastly some immigrants come to work to support their families but are unable to get a proper work visa because in our current broken immigration system the number of visas for low-wage workers cannot match demand for such workers. As a result, as many as 300,000 undocumented people each year are absorbed into the U.S. workforce.

*Do the bishops support open borders?*

The U.S. bishops and the teachings of the Catholic Church have consistently respected the right of the sovereign state to control its borders – it functions as one of the principles in their pastoral letter *“Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope.”* However, the Church, along with other members of civil society, has the right to work to change laws which are believed to violate basic human dignity, imbued by the Creator. In the case of immigration, the U.S. bishops believe that the broken U.S. immigration system unjustly separates families, denies due process and contributes to the exploitation of immigrant workers in the workplace.

*Do immigrants increase the crime rate?*

Recently published research has shown that immigrant communities do not increase the crime rate and that immigrants actually commit fewer crimes than native born Americans. Although the number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States tripled from 3.5 million to 11 million between 1990 and 2013, the corresponding violent crime rate declined by 48%. This was matched by a 41% reduction in property crime over the same period.

*Do immigrants pay taxes?*

Undocumented immigrants pay a wide range of taxes, including sales taxes where applicable. They also pay property taxes, directly if they own their homes and indirectly if they rent. Between one half and three quarters of undocumented immigrants pay state and federal taxes. In fact, estimates state that undocumented immigrants pay an estimated 11.64 billion dollars every year in state and local taxes.

**Source: Justice for Immigrants Campaign of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops**

*Mike LaFrance* is a father, a grandfather and a lawyer. After the death of his wife he sought a group dedicated to prayer, living in community, and serving the poor. He joined the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers of North America where his ministry is with undocumented immigrants. In 2016, before last year’s presidential election, he wrote:

*I work full time representing children and adults who the administration attempts to starve out by denying them even a work permit, food assistance, and medical care. That not working, they then spend in excess of $10,000 attempting to deport one person.*

*The news media publishes all politicians’ statements, and facts are often missed. Here are some facts and conclusions in the interest of truth[[1]](#footnote-1):*

* Our border is more secure than ever.
* US taxpayers currently spend roughly $19 billion a year to secure our border, which is the same amount of money all other federal criminal law enforcement agencies have combined.
* The [Obama] administration increased Border Patrol staffing to an all-time high of nearly 21,500 agents in 2011 and his Administration has virtually ended the practice of "voluntary returns," or turning back Mexicans without any consequences.
* During the past 8 years [2008-2016], over 2.5 million immigrants have been deported, up 23% from the George W. Bush years. Obama is now on pace to deport more people than the sum of all 19 presidents who governed the United States from 1892-2000, according to government data. The average cost to deport per person exceeds $10,000 plus the costs to state and local police.
* Immigration to the US has actually decreased.
* Illegal immigration is at its lowest level since 1972. The only increase in arrivals are unaccompanied children fleeing gang violence and drug cartels in Central America.
* More Mexicans have been leaving our country in recent years than arriving at our border.
* For countless immigrants, there is no "line” [to get into for legal status].
* Most undocumented immigrants don't have the necessary family or employment relationships to even get in line and often can't qualify for refugee or asylum status. Even those who can get in line and have done everything possible to emigrate legally typically face significant backlogs. For example, married children of US citizens from Mexico must wait more than 20 years for a visa to become available. An exception has been made for Cubans, who can come to the U.S. and get a work permit while waiting for their visas, and to a lesser extent for Haitians since the 2010 earthquake.
* Undocumented immigrants contribute greatly to our economy.
* Undocumented immigrants paid roughly $12 billion in state and local taxes in 2013.
* Upwards of two thirds of undocumented immigrants pay into the Social Security system, without any expectation of ever collecting benefits. Estimated contributions are $15 billion a year.
* If Congress were to fix our broken immigration system, the federal deficit would be reduced by app. $200 billion in the first 10 years alone.

*Brother Michael LaFrance, CFC*

1. Taken from Americans for Immigrant Justice, an award-winning non-profit law firm that protects and promotes the basic human rights of immigrants. http://www.aijustice.org/the\_truth\_on\_immigration [↑](#footnote-ref-1)