

## Clothe the Naked, Feed the Poor and Welcome the Stranger

As the Congress debates this week the issue of immigration and as thousands of people demonstrate on the streets of Los Angeles, Detroit, Chicago and Dallas, our Catholic faith and tradition call us to a deep questioning of many of our 'self-protecting' assumptions.

The issue of immigration is one of these public policy issues where it is very easy to take side without spending time "forming our Catholic conscience". In the flurry of legislative activities preceding the Christmas break, the House passed a bill which would provide funds to build a "fence" between Mexico and the U.S. and would criminalize all those who help illegal immigrants. This bill adopted in spite of the objection of many religious groups reflects the frustration of many but denies the basic human values we want to be part of our life as well as the Gospel mandate which is the foundation of our faith: ***Clothe the naked, feed the poor and welcome the stranger.*** This week, the Judiciary Committee of the Senate came up with a proposed reform who would afford better protection to those who want and, many times, need to work in this country for their own subsistence.

In a joint "Interfaith Statement" religious leaders in the U.S. ask for an immigration reform "because each day in our congregations, service programs, health-care facilities, and schools we witness the human consequences of an outmoded system". We know about immigrant families who have lost loved ones to death in the desert, we know about systematic exploitation at the hand of smugglers, exploitation of workers who do not receive a just wage, and families which cannot be reunited because of inhuman policies.

The Conference of US Bishops has asked elected officials to enact legislation which would include the four following principles:

- An opportunity for many immigrants who are already contributing to the this country to regularize their status;
- To enact a family-based immigration system which would allow to preserve the unity of families;
- To create legal avenues for workers who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter the country and work in a safe, legal environment;
- To enact protection of our borders in ways which are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect.

Many statements of religious leaders regarding the issue of immigration reform, including the last statement of Cardinal Mahony, can be found at [www.justiceforimmigrants.org](http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org)  
Let's not forget the words of the Old Testament: "the strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you too were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33-34)