

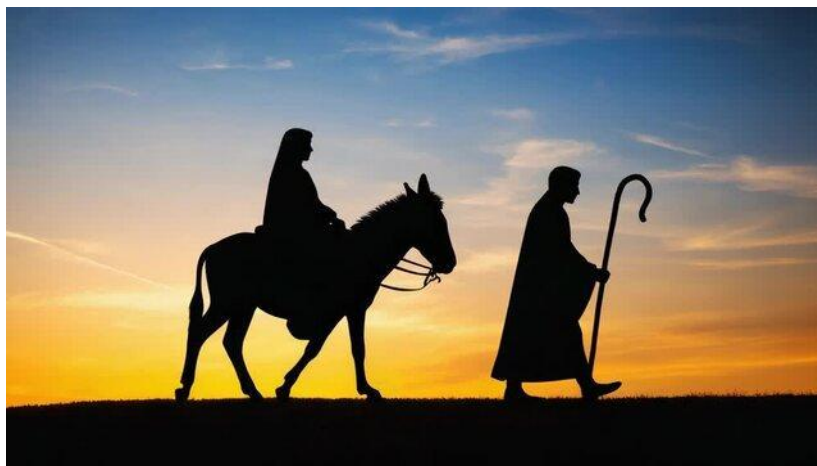


Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples

**A United States Conference of Catholic Bishops resource for their
2000 pastoral statement, "*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity
in Diversity*"**

**Updated in 2026 to include American Catholic bishops' statements on
the mass deportation of immigrants**

June 2026



Resource Introduction



The current US policy of mass arrests and deportations of immigrants has been denounced by Popes Francis and Leo and America's Catholic bishops, because it conflicts with core Catholic and biblical teachings on welcoming immigrants. Since this policy is a centerpiece of today's United States immigration policy, it poses a moral challenge for every American Catholic.

This United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) parish resource was created in 2000 for their pastoral statement, "Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity In Diversity." The resource, updated in 2026 by Catholics Welcome Immigrants, a group of concerned Long Islanders, uses the USCCB statement and the 2025 United States Conference and New York State Conference of Catholic Bishops' statements on mass deportations, along with Catholic Social Teaching and other resources, to help Long Island parishioners pray, discern, discuss, and reflect on our nation's immigrant history and the church's teachings about immigration in the context of the current US immigration policy debate.

The resource is designed to encourage Catholics to consider prayerfully how to balance a nation's right to regulate its borders with our Catholic moral responsibility to welcome immigrants. The resource is linked to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2026 prayer service marking the 250th anniversary of the United States, "A Path Toward Justice: A National Prayer Service Honoring the Many Journeys that Shaped America", the USCCB's *National Migration Week*, September 20-27, 2026 and the Vatican's 112th *World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, September 27, 2026, which you can read about [here](#). This year, Pope Leo has asked that the World Day of Migrants and Refugees focus on the plight of migrant children.

Today, some Catholics, like Americans from previous eras, have concerns about mass immigration possibly threatening their personal security and America's cultural identity. As we craft just and responsible public-policy positions on immigration, Long Island Catholics will benefit from the resource's interconnection of church teachings and traditions, American immigration history and policy options on what our moral responsibilities are to immigrants seeking entry into the United States. **For information about Catholics Welcome Immigrants or this resource contact rkmicahli@gmail.com or call 631-499-6725**

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Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples

2026 Update

Another American Immigration “Crisis”

A Troubled U.S. History of Immigration

**By
Catholics Welcome Immigrants**



In February 2025, two months before his death, Pope Francis wrote to every American bishop, addressing “the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations,” which he had called a “disgrace.” America, described by John F. Kennedy as a “nation of immigrants,” has in fact had a series of “crises” as millions of immigrants came in mass waves, first the Irish, Germans and Scandinavians, 1840s-1860s, then the Southern and Eastern Europeans, 1880s-1920s and now Latin Americans, Asians and Africans, 1965 to the present.

Each wave of immigration has been met with hostility from native-born Americans. “No Irish Need Apply” was common in help wanted ads during the 1850s. Old St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City still has a wall built to protect it from anti-Catholic mobs. One prominent American at that time published an essay accusing Irish Catholic immigrants of fostering crime because their Sacrament of Penance allowed them to violate American laws and then be forgiven by a priest. Today, descendants of Irish immigrants play important roles in American life, including law enforcement.

On March 16, 1898, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts told the US Senate that immigration should be restricted because the new immigrants, “Italians, Russians, Poles, Hungarians, Greeks, and Asiatics” were people whom “English-speaking people have never hitherto assimilated, and who are most alien to the great body of the people of the United States.” These “alien” peoples were in fact assimilated because, despite repeated anti-immigrant outbursts, America does welcome and is indeed a “nation of immigrants.”

Nevertheless, in 1924, hostility toward Asian, Southern and Eastern European immigrants caused Congress to enact the National Origins Act that virtually shut down immigration from these regions until 1965. That law was in part driven by pseudo-scientific eugenics theories popular at the time, claiming that these immigrants were racially inferior to Northern and Western Europeans, such as the Germans and English. This is the law that barred many thousands of European Jews fleeing the Holocaust from seeking asylum in our country.

Again, We Hear the Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric



Today the old anti-immigrant arguments are again being used to halt immigration, particularly from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, and to fuel the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants who entered the country without proper legal authorization. Until the 1920s, US laws were open to immigrants with few restrictions, impediments or requirements barring their entry into this country.

Today, US immigration laws are restrictive and very complex, which is why so many undocumented immigrants are entering the country. **For over thirty years, Congress has been unable or unwilling to enact comprehensive immigration reform modernizing our laws, so they legally admit refugees, immigrants seeking asylum or workers needed by our economy in fields such as agriculture, leisure, health care, technology, and manufacturing.**

The current Administration ran in 2024 on the promise of mass deportations of undocumented immigrants. They have delivered on that promise. Between January

2025 and May of 2026, over 2.5 million people have left the country, according to the [Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\)](#). Official government data indicates more than 605,000 were formal deportations. Some reports from April 2026 show ICE alone deported 443,000 people in the 2025 fiscal year. The White House and Department of Homeland Security report approximately 700,000 arrests of undocumented immigrants since the start of the current Administration. Independent analysts noted that by early 2026, ICE reached a peak average of 1,264 arrests per day. Approximately 1.9 million individuals are categorized as having "self-deported" following the administration's crackdown and incentive programs.

White House advisor Stephen Miller, who oversees the Administration's deportation policies, has demanded an end to our current wave of immigration, which he castigated as "the single largest experiment on a society, on a civilization, that has ever been conducted in human history." ([New York Times](#)) Under his leadership the Administration revoked Temporary Protective Status and other legal protections, thereby, with the stroke of a pen, making "illegal" about a million immigrants already here legally.

While the Administration promised to arrest and deport "the worst of the worst" immigrants—rapists, drug dealers, murderers and other criminals—studies by research institutes, including the Immigration Research [Initiative](#) and the politically-conservative [Cato](#) Institute, have shown that from 60 percent to 80 percent of the immigrants arrested have no criminal record.

A recent report by [Newsday](#) found that only 5 percent of immigrants detained at the Nassau County Jail were convicted of violent crimes. In addition, ICE agents, charged with arresting immigrants, have been accused of major violations of civil rights, including detentions without judicial search or arrest warrants and racial profiling of immigrants based solely on their ethnicity, accents, skin color, or even the work they do. Meanwhile, Nassau and Suffolk counties have become hotbeds of ICE arrests, with the [New York Times](#) reporting that Long Island has 60 percent more arrests than anywhere else in New York State.

These mass arrests cause fear in immigrant communities, even among immigrants with legal status, they tear families apart, rip parents from their children, undermine local businesses that rely on immigrant workers, and terrorize immigrants who now fear sending their children to school or visiting health-care clinics or shopping for food or even attending Mass.



The Catholic Church Responds

Historically, the American Catholic Church has stood side by side with immigrants, welcoming and helping them adapt to their new country. Mother Francis Xavier Cabrini, herself an Italian immigrant who became the first US citizen declared a saint, heroically defended Southern and Eastern European immigrants against nativist bigotry while building an infrastructure of orphanages, schools and hospitals to serve their needs.



Today, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Charities of Long Island and many parishes in the Diocese of Rockville Centre are continuing the work of Mother Cabrini, offering counseling, legal services and charitable support to help immigrants adjust to their new country. As the government's anti-immigrant policies ramped up, these agencies and parishes have been inundated with calls for help from beleaguered immigrants.

Experiencing the suffering of immigrants firsthand, the American Catholic Church is calling for an end to immoral American government policies that harass, intimidate and degrade immigrants. These are the policies that have caused huge increases in the demands placed on Catholic institutions here on Long Island and throughout the United States.

In October 2025, Pope Leo called upon American bishops to collectively oppose "indiscriminate mass deportation" and what he describes as the "inhumane" treatment of migrants. In November 2025, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) voted to release a Special Pastoral [Message](#) on Immigration that began with this statement:

"As pastors, we the bishops of the United States are bound to our people by ties of communion and compassion in Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are disturbed when we see among our people a climate of fear and anxiety around questions of profiling and immigration enforcement. We are saddened by the state of

contemporary debate and the vilification of immigrants. We are concerned about the conditions in detention centers and the lack of access to pastoral care. We lament that some immigrants in the United States have arbitrarily lost their legal status. We are troubled by threats against the sanctity of houses of worship and the special nature of hospitals and schools. We are grieved when we meet parents who fear being detained when taking their children to school and when we try to console family members who have already been separated from their loved ones.”

About the same time, the New York State Conference of Catholic Bishops (NYSCCB) released their own [statement](#), “For You Too Were Once Aliens,” in which they clearly stated, “General enforcement of the immigration laws must be carried out in a humane manner that does not target the hard-working and law-abiding; that does not permit the wanton and unnecessary separation of families; and that does not rely on campaigns of fear that cripple whole communities.”

These two bishops’ condemnations of the mass arrests and deportations of immigrants represent the latest of many Catholic teachings calling for Americans and all peoples to welcome immigrants and treat them with dignity. Citing the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the New York bishops wrote:

“The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him.”

Earlier, in 2000, the USCCB released a major [statement](#) on immigration, “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us. Unity in Diversity,” in which they wrote: “Unity in diversity is the vision we bishops ... offer to our people as they welcome new immigrants and refugees who come to our shores.” Thus, while Catholic teachings recognize the right of every nation to control its borders, our teachings also demand that all immigrants be treated with respect and dignity and that they be welcomed as one of us, for we “too were once aliens in the land of Egypt.”



Utilizing This Resource in the Parish

The 2000 US bishops' pastoral statement *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity* and the 2025 USCCB and NYSCCB bishops' *statements* challenging the mass deportation of immigrants are firmly grounded in the Church's social teaching. Catholics Welcome Immigrants has updated the original USCCB resource to include a brief history of mass immigration to the United States in the context of church teachings and the two bishops' statements issued in 2025 challenging current anti-immigrant government policies.

Understanding and appreciating Catholic Social Teaching helps us to put our faith into action. Is your parish community looking for opportunities to better understand and practice what our faith teaches? Using this resource as a study guide, discussion starter, and guide to action can provide such opportunities.

For which parish groups is it intended?

- *Priests and deacons, parish staff, particularly educators and catechists:*

This resource will help to better educate them about Catholic social teaching as it pertains to the pastoral statement and will assist them in teaching others.

- *RCIA groups, young adult groups, and small faith communities:*

This resource can be copied and distributed to these groups for use as bulletin inserts, a study and discussion guide, a guide to preaching and as a guide to action.

Core Resources

Here again are the resources to frame your parish activities:

- 2026 Update on page 3 above [bulletin](#)
- The USCCB 2000 [statement](#) on immigration
- The USCCB 2025 [statement](#) on immigration.
- The NYSCCB 2025 [statement](#) on immigration
- The “Biblical Vision of Love for Strangers” immediately below
- “Three Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration” immediately below
- Participants’ knowledge of and opinions about current immigration issues and their individual conscience discernment and faith perspectives.

Biblical Vision of Love for Strangers

Both the Old and New Testaments tell compelling stories of refugees forced to flee because of oppression. Exodus tells the story of the Chosen People, Israel, who were victims of bitter slavery in Egypt. They were utterly helpless by themselves, but with God's powerful intervention, they were able to escape and take refuge in the desert. For forty years they lived as wanderers with no homeland of their own. Finally, God fulfilled his ancient promise and settled them on the land that they could finally call home.

The Israelites' experience of living as homeless aliens was so painful and frightening that God ordered his people for all time to have special care for the alien: "You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lv 19:33-34).

The New Testament begins with Matthew's story of Joseph and Mary's escape to Egypt with their newborn son, Jesus, because the paranoid and jealous King Herod wanted to kill the infant. Our Savior himself lived as a refugee because his own land was not safe.

Jesus reiterates the Old Testament command to love and care for the stranger, a criterion by which we shall be judged: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).

The Apostle Paul asserts the absolute equality of all people before God: "There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In Christ, the human race is one before God, equal in dignity and rights.

Three Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration

Although Catholic theology has always promoted human rights rooted in natural law and God's revelation, it was the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (*On the Condition of Labor*) in 1891 that developed a systematic presentation of principles of the rights and responsibilities of people. *Rerum Novarum* commented on the situation of immigrants; in later documents, popes and bishops' conferences have synthesized the Catholic theological tradition to articulate three basic principles on immigration.

First Principle: People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.

At the end of World War II, with the fall of the Nazi empire and the subsequent creation of the Soviet "Iron Curtain," Europe faced an unprecedented migration of millions of people seeking safety, food, and freedom. At that time, Pope Pius XII wrote *Exsul Familia* (*The Emigre Family*), placing the church squarely on the side of those seeking a better life by fleeing their homes.

When there is a massive movement of people, such as during a war, natural disaster, or famine, the lands that receive these displaced people may be threatened. The influx may make it impossible for the native population to live securely, as the land may not

have enough resources to support both. Even in more orderly migrations, such as in the United States, citizens and residents of the land may fear that newcomers will take jobs, land, and resources, impoverishing the people already present.

Because of the belief that newcomers compete for scarce resources, immigrants and refugees are at times driven away, resented, or despised. Nevertheless, the first principle of Catholic social teaching regarding immigrants is that people have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families. This is based on biblical and ancient Christian teaching that the goods of the earth belong to all people. While the right to private property is defended in Catholic social teaching, individuals do not have the right to use private property without regard for the common good.

Every person has an equal right to receive from the earth what is necessary for life—food, clothing, shelter. Moreover, every person has the right to education, medical care, religion, and the expression of one's culture. In many places people live in fear, danger, or dehumanizing poverty. Clearly, it is not God's will that some of his children live in luxury while others have nothing. In Luke's Gospel, the rich man was condemned for living well while the poor man starved at his doorstep (Lk 16:19-31).

The native does not have superior rights over the immigrant. Before God all are equal; the earth was given by God to all. When a person cannot achieve a meaningful life in his or her own land, that person has the right to move.

Second Principle: A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration.

The overriding principle of all Catholic social teaching is that individuals must make economic, political, and social decisions not out of shortsighted self-interest, but with regard for the common good. That means that a moral person cannot consider only what is good for his or her own self and family, but must act with the good of all people as his or her guiding principle.

While individuals have the right to move in search of a safe and humane life, no country is bound to accept all those who wish to resettle there. By this principle the church recognizes that most immigration is ultimately not something to celebrate. Ordinarily, people do not leave the security of their own land and culture just to seek adventure in a new place or merely to enhance their standard of living. Instead, they migrate because they are desperate and the opportunity for a safe and secure life does not exist in their own land. Immigrants and refugees endure many hardships and often long for the homes they left behind. As Americans we should cherish and celebrate the contributions of immigrants and their cultures; however, we should work to make it unnecessary for people to leave their own land.

Because there seems to be no end to poverty, war, and misery in the world, developed nations will continue to experience pressure from many peoples who desire to resettle in their lands. Catholic social teaching is realistic: While people have the right to move, no country has the duty to receive so many immigrants that its social and economic life are jeopardized.

For this reason, Catholics should not view the work of the federal government and its immigration control as negative or evil. Those who work to enforce our nation's immigration laws often do so out of a sense of loyalty to the common good and compassion for poor people seeking a better life. In an ideal world, there would be no need for immigration control. The church recognizes that this ideal world has not yet been achieved.

Third Principle: A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

The second principle of Catholic social teaching may seem to negate the first principle. However, principles one and two must be understood in the context of principle three. And all Catholic social teaching must be understood in light of the absolute equality of all people and the commitment to the common good.

A country's regulation of borders and control of immigration must be governed by concern for all people and by mercy and justice. A nation may not simply decide that it wants to provide for its own people and no others. A sincere commitment to the needs of all must prevail.

In our modern world, where communication and travel are much easier, the burden of emergencies cannot be placed solely on nations immediately adjacent to the crises. Justice dictates that the world community contribute resources toward shelter, food, medical services, and basic welfare.

Even in the case of less urgent migrations, a developed nation's right to limit immigration must be based on justice, mercy, and the common good, not on self-interest. Moreover, immigration policy ought to take into account other important values such as the right of families to live together. A merciful immigration policy will not force married couples or children to live separated from their families for long periods.

Undocumented immigrants present a special concern. Often their presence is considered criminal since they arrive without legal permission. Under the harshest view, undocumented people may be regarded as undeserving of rights or services. This is not the view of Catholic social teaching. The Catholic Church teaches that every person has basic human rights and is entitled to have basic human needs met—food, shelter, clothing, education, and health care. Undocumented persons are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by employers, and they are not able to complain because of the fear of discovery and deportation. Current immigration policy that criminalizes the mere attempt to immigrate and imprisons immigrants who have committed no crime or who have already served a just sentence for a crime is immoral. In the Bible, God promises that our judgment will be based on our treatment of the most vulnerable. Before God we cannot excuse inhumane treatment of certain persons by claiming that their lack of legal status deprives them of rights given by the Creator.

Finally, immigration policy that allows people to live here and contribute to society for years but refuses to offer them the opportunity to achieve legal status does not serve the common good. The presence of millions of people living without easy access to basic human rights and necessities is a great injustice.

It is the position of the Catholic Church that pastoral, educational, medical, and social services provided by the Church are never conditioned on legal status. All persons are invited to participate in our parishes, attend our schools, and receive other services offered by our institutions and programs.

Suggested Parish Activities for Recognizing That the United States is a Nation of Immigrants

Activities and Questions for Discussion Groups

- Have participants tell the stories of their own families' immigration to the United States. Compare the stories of those who have recently immigrated with those who immigrated many years ago to demonstrate that the reasons for immigration have not changed. Consider hosting a covered-dish supper for this program. Interpreters and interpretation devices may be needed in multi-ethnic parishes. For assistance contact Richard Koubek at the Long Island Immigrant Justice Alliance: rkmicahli@gmail.com
- Ask participants to reflect on the changing ethnic composition of the parish and the neighborhood over its history.
- Ask participants to offer examples of how immigration and cultural diversity have changed the United States. Have them evaluate these changes.

What does the Church mean by the "right to migrate"?

- Do you agree that every person has the right to migrate to find the means to sustain life? Are there limitations on this right?
- Do you think that people have any duty to stay in their own land and to try to improve it?
- Do you believe that certain immigrants have a superior right to migrate? For example, consider a refugee fleeing a war, a poor family seeking a better life, and a computer engineer seeking a better job. Whom does U.S. immigration policy favor? What should our policy be?

What is the right of the nation to regulate immigration and to control its borders?

- Do you think that US immigration policy is merciful and just? Why or why not?
- What are your feelings towards those who enforce our nation's immigration laws?
- If you believe that immigration policy needs modification, what changes would you suggest?

What should our attitude toward undocumented immigrants be?

- How should the United States regard and treat undocumented immigrants?

- How can we protect the rights of such people when they are treated unfairly by their employers?
- What government services should be provided to undocumented persons?
- What should be the church's message to undocumented persons? How should they be treated in the local parish?

Consider the following situations and offer ideas about how you and your parish can respond. For each item offer ideas about how to shape attitudes and to advocate for human rights.

- Immigration policy that favors highly skilled professionals over family reunification and movement of poor people seeking a better life
- The current policy that essentially closes US borders to asylum seekers, refugees and others seeking entry into the country
- The current policy that calls for the arrest and deportation of anyone who entered the US without proper documentation
- The reluctance of neighborhoods, parishes, and individuals to accept different cultures, languages, and customs
- The imprisonment of undocumented immigrants while they seek to have their legal rights resolved
- Undocumented immigrants seeking to enroll their children in Catholic schools
- Undocumented immigrants seeking to enroll their children in public schools
- Refugee crises in Africa, Central America, Venezuela, Ecuador, Columbia, Mexico, Myanmar or the Middle East

Other suggested activities

- Attend Mass with an immigrant community and reflect on the experience.
- Learn a few words of the native languages of immigrants who worship in your parish.
- Visit immigrants held in prison while waiting for their cases to be resolved.
- Ask to meet with representatives of the Immigration and Naturalization Service to learn about their work and suggest ways they can better enforce the nation's laws while respecting the rights and needs of immigrants.
- Identify immigrants in the parish still waiting for family members to be permitted to enter the United States. Learn about the process of sponsoring family members, and write to those still waiting overseas to promise friendship and welcome when they finally arrive.

- Meet with local hospital and public health personnel to ask about how undocumented persons are able to receive medical care.
- Meet with public school officials to ask how undocumented immigrant children are able to attend school.

Bulletin Inserts

Publish these resources as bulletin inserts. Word copies can be downloaded [here](#) for publication in your parish bulletin.

Also consider publishing in your bulletin the 2025 USCCB statement found [here](#) and the NYSCCB statement found [here](#) on mass deportations.

The Cabrini Pledge

The NY State Conference of Catholic Bishops' 2025 statement on immigration asks Catholics to sign the Cabrini Pledge which can be read [here](#). The pledge calls upon Catholics to open their hearts and minds to immigrants, refugees, and migrants. Consider publishing the pledge in your bulletin and collecting signatures after Masses

Sample Homily Notes for Sunday September 20th 2026 Marking the Start of the USCCB *National Migration Week*

Some parishes may choose to mark the beginning of the USCCB 2026 *National Migration Week* with a homily and petition prayers on Sunday, September 26th, the Twenty Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Fr. William Brisotti, Pastor Emeritus of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Church in Wyandanch and a member of Catholics Welcome Immigrants, offered these homily notes for September 26th which can be read [here](#).

Petition Prayers for Immigrants

Include in Mass petition/intercession prayers for immigrants contained in the USCCB 2026 prayer service marking the 250th anniversary of the United States, "A Path Toward Justice: National Prayer Service Honoring the Many Journeys That Shaped America." You can access the full prayer service [here](#).

Petitions

For all bishops in our Church, that they may be encouraged by our prayers and support to lead God's people in building a culture that respects the human dignity of all migrants, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For all Catholics, that God inspire them to take action in their local communities to support and protect migrants and to advocate on their behalf, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

1. For unaccompanied migrant children, that God protect them on their journey and safely reunite them with their families, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For our neighbors, coworkers, friends, fellow Christians, and all people, that they may grow in their awareness of the issue of migration and become a voice in the public square calling for greater protections for these populations, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For migrant workers, that they may labor in safe and just conditions, and that we who benefit from their labor may be truly grateful for what they provide, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For migrants, refugees, and all other strangers in our midst, that they may find strength in our concern for justice and feel the warmth of our love, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For an end to all strife and persecution that gives rise to refugee crises, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For policy makers in our nation, that God grant them the wisdom to enact laws that provide greater protection for all migrant populations, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

Prayer Services for Immigrants

Organize a prayer service for immigrants such as the USCCB 2026 prayer service which you can access [here](#) or this prayer service.

Interfaith Worker Justice Prayer Service for Immigrants

Open with a scriptural passage such as stories of Exodus, of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, or of their flight to Egypt, or Matthew's Gospel or "*You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt.*" (Leviticus 19:33--34)

An Alien's Prayer

Leader:

I wear the mark of your disapproval and your often unspoken words pierce straight to my soul, “Why didn’t you stay where you belong?”

I feel the icy stare that says, “Keep your distance, you foreigner, with your different-colored skin and your strange-sounding speech, with your culture, food, religion, and clothing that are inferior to my own.”

I’m an immigrant, a wetback, an alien, an outsider operating a sweatshop sewing machine; cheap labor, unwanted or dirty jobs are mine for the taking; I’m one of the countless invisible ones who puts fresh vegetables on your plate or stitches the fashion dresses and shirts that you buy in your stylish stores.

As [the Bible reminds us], “Remember, you were once aliens in the land of Egypt,” remember that your grandfathers and grandmothers were immigrant unwanted, were exploited cheap labor, second-class citizens, uneducated and poor, used and abused, ignored or looked down upon for their foreign religion, speech, and food.

All:

Creator God, help us to remember that when we speak of immigrants and refugees, we speak of Christ. In the One who had no place to lay his head, and in the least of his brothers and sisters, you come to us again, a stranger seeking refuge. We confess that we often turn away.

Intercessions

The prayer leader may wish to incorporate intercessions from the preceding suggested activity or to ask the participants to offer spontaneous prayers for their intentions.

Closing Prayer:

Our God, you have given us in your word the stories of persons who needed to leave their homelands—Abraham, Sarah, Ruth, Moses. You have chosen that the life of Jesus be filled with events of unplanned travel and flight from enemies. You have shown us through the modeling of Jesus how we are called to relate to persons from different nations and cultures. You have called us to be teachers of your word. We ask you, our God, to open our minds and hearts to the challenge and invitation to model your perfect example of love. Amen.

“An Alien’s Prayer” by Edward Hays is reprinted with permission from Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim, copyright © 1989, Forest of Peace Publishing, 251 Muncie Rd., Leavenworth, Ks 66048

SOURCE: Interfaith Worker Justice, *For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. Through the Lens of Faith* (Resource K: Liturgical resources for the Christian community, P p. 81-82) www.iwj.org

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