

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Catholic Teaching on Immigration



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What does the Church say about illegal immigration and undocumented migrants?

The Catholic Church affirms the rule of law and encourages the use of lawful immigration pathways. The Church does not encourage unnecessary or irregular migration. “Ideally, unnecessary migration ought to be avoided; this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development” (*Fratelli tutti*, no. 129). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens” (No. 2241).

Does the Catholic Church advocate for “open borders”?

No. The Catechism clearly states that political authorities “may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions” (No. 2241). This includes a sovereign country’s right to regulate and secure its borders. The Church does maintain, however, that this right must always be balanced with the duty to welcome newcomers with charity and respect for the human person, as well as the rights to life and religious liberty.

What is the Church’s perspective on federal immigration reform and “mass deportations”?

As recognized by the Church for decades, the current immigration system is inadequate to address the needs of American families, employers, and communities, as well as immigrants themselves. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has consistently supported increased opportunities for legal immigration and the protection for immigrants’ due process rights, while opposing an enforcement-only approach to immigration. Further, enforcement actions should be targeted, proportionate, and humane, and deportations and other enforcement actions should always be carried out with due regard for families, community ties, and religious liberty interests. In its most recent message on immigration, the USCCB stated that the country’s immigration system should be one that:

- Offers fair and generous pathways to full citizenship for immigrants living and working for many years within this country.
- Keeps borders safe and secure, with enforcement policies that focus on those who present dangers to society, particularly efforts to reduce gang activity, stem the flow of drugs, and end human trafficking.
- Provides permanent relief for childhood arrivals, helps families stay together, and welcomes refugees.
- Serves as an effective asylum system for those fleeing persecution and protects vulnerable migrants and their families, many of whom have already been victimized by criminal actors.

Why do Catholic organizations serve people who enter the U.S. without authorization?

Faithful to Jesus’ mandate to “welcome the stranger,” Catholic-affiliated organizations provide basic human needs to migrants because all people are made in God’s image and likeness and inherently possess human dignity. There is no evidence or research indicating that the humanitarian and religious services provided by Catholic organizations incentivize unlawful migration, as there are varied and often complex factors that influence a person’s decision to migrate from their home country, including war, persecution, violence, lack of jobs, famines, and natural disasters.

Visit usccb.org/migrationministries for more FAQs and to learn how the Church serves migrants.