

## **MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS ENTERING OUR COUNTRY AND WHAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH BELIEVES**

### **Perceived Myth: Immigrants take jobs and opportunity away from Americans**

**Known Fact:** The largest wave of immigration to the U.S. since the early 1900s coincided with our lowest national unemployment rate and fastest economic growth. Immigrant entrepreneurs also create jobs for U.S. and foreign workers. While there has been no comprehensive study done of immigrant-owned businesses, there are countless examples: in Silicon Valley, companies begun by Chinese and Indian immigrants generated more than \$19.5 billion in sales and nearly 73,000 jobs in 2000. (Source: *Immigration and Unemployment: New Evidence*, Alexis de Tocqueville Institution)

### **Aren't immigrants taking jobs from U.S. workers? Why do businesses hire them?**

During the 1990s, half of all new workers were foreign-born, filling gaps left by native-born workers in both the high- and low-skill ends of the spectrum. Immigrants fill jobs in key sectors, start their own businesses, and contribute to a thriving economy. The net benefit of immigration to the U.S. is nearly \$10 billion annually. As Alan Greenspan points out, 70% of immigrants arrive in prime working age. That means we haven't spent a penny on their education, yet they are transplanted into our workforce and will contribute \$500 billion toward our social security system over the next 20 years

The U.S. Department of Labor projects that by 2010, the U.S. will have created 22 million new jobs—nine million more jobs than new (native-born) workers entering the job market. This gap will increase after 2010 as the “baby boomers” reach retirement age and leave the labor force.

Today, our immigration laws do not reflect this demographic and economic reality. Our immigration laws should be reconciled with the economic laws of supply and demand. Immigration reform would address a range of workforce realities—legalizing a workforce that is here to stay, providing more legal visas for workers to come in the future, and providing for the temporary employment of foreign workers who help American employers in sectors of the economy that provide seasonal jobs.

### **Perceived Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes**

**Known Fact:** Immigrants pay taxes, in the form of income, property, sales, and taxes at the federal and state level. As far as income tax payments go, sources vary in their accounts, but a range of studies find that immigrants pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes.

**Undocumented immigrants pay income taxes as well, as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers), which grew by \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998**

(Source: [http://www.immigrationforum.org/about/articles/tax\\_study.htm](http://www.immigrationforum.org/about/articles/tax_study.htm))

### **How do immigrants pay taxes?**

Immigrants pay taxes in a number of ways, including income and sales tax. The majority of undocumented immigrants pay income taxes using Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) or false Social Security numbers. Studies show that immigrants contribute more in taxes and Social Security payments than they consume in public resources. The most authoritative study conducted by the National Research Council found that the average immigrant pays nearly \$1,800 per year more than he or she uses in services such as education and healthcare. In addition, the Social Security system reaps the biggest windfall from taxes paid by immigrants; the Social Security Administration reports that it holds approximately \$420 billion from the earnings of immigrants who are not in a position to claim benefits. (Testimony by social Security Administration March 2004)

In addition to state income taxes, all immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, pay the same sales taxes and property taxes—whether they own homes or taxes are passed through to rents—as everyone else. The majority of state and local costs of schooling and other services are funded by these taxes.

The NRC also estimates that the economic benefits of immigration run as high as \$10 billion a year. Immigrants contribute to the economy by working in jobs and performing services vital to our way of life and contribute to the common good thru their service and their taxes.

### **Perceived Myth: Immigrants come here to take welfare**

**Known Fact: Immigrants come to work and reunite with family members. Immigrant labor force participation is consistently higher than native-born, and immigrant workers make up a larger share of the U.S. labor force (12.4%) than they do the U.S. population (11.5%).** (Source: Census)

### **Aren't immigrants taking advantage of social services and costing taxpayers?**

Immigrants come to work and to reunite with their family. Most immigrants, except for children, are employed. Because most work, albeit many in lower paying jobs, the ratio between immigrant use of public benefits to amount of taxes they pay is favorable. In one estimate immigrants pay about \$90 billion in taxes and use about \$5 billion in public benefits. Others estimate that immigrant taxes total \$20 - \$30 billion more than cost of government services.

The reason for this is that undocumented immigrants are ineligible for the vast majority of state and federal benefits and are only eligible for those that are considered important to public health and safety.

The few public benefits that undocumented immigrants may receive include emergency Medicaid, nutritional assistance to women, infants and children under the WIC program and school lunches and breakfasts. Eligibility for these few programs and services is designed to provide emergency medical care, to reduce the risk that innocent children will be punished or hurt as a result of their parents' immigration status, and to serve the fiscal and long-term interests of all Americans.

Even legal permanent resident immigrants are functionally ineligible for most government programs. They are prohibited from receiving most cash assistance during their first three years in the country and are subject to deportation if they become a public charge within five years of entry.

### **Perceived Myth: Catholic Bishops (Church) support illegal immigration**

#### **Known Fact:**

**The Catholic Church and the Bishops do not condone unlawful entry or circumventions of our nation's immigration laws. The bishops believe that reforms are necessary for our immigration system to respond to the realities of separated families and labor demands that compel people to immigrate to the United States in an authorized and unauthorized fashion.** (Source: [I Was a Stranger, and You Welcome Me: Meeting Christ in New Neighbors](#) Indiana Catholic Bishops)

#### **Why is the church so concerned about immigration?**

The Catholic Church does not support unlawful entry into the U.S. or any country. The Church respects the right of nations to control their borders and to enact laws in the best interest of its citizens. Yet the Church teaches that some rights are inherent in the human condition; these are natural rights, which extend beyond all national boundaries. All immigrants, legal and illegal, have natural rights from their inherent dignity as persons. Each is created in the image of God. (Gaudium et Spes)

All people should have their basic needs met in their homeland but have the right to seek basic needs abroad if they cannot be met at home. The dignity of the human person must be respected and priority must be given to family (re)unification. The Church responds to immigrants not from their legal status but from the dictates of our belief and teaching. While an action or immigration status can be illegal, a person can never be illegal.

Nations may regulate borders to provide for national security, tranquility and prosperity, but the right to regulate borders is not absolute. Regulations must promote the common good, which includes not only members of the nation but also the universal human family. (Catechism of Catholic Church)

The Church in the U.S. is especially mindful of the immigrant because it is an immigrant Church, made up of people from all parts of earth.

The Church has a responsibility to assist the newcomer. In Scripture, God calls upon his people to care for the alien. "So, you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Deut 10: 17-19). And in chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus identifies with the marginalized and commands us to respond when he said, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me".

For more information about the Church's position see the pastoral statement by the Catholic Bishops of Indiana, [I Was a Stranger, and You Welcome Me: Meeting Christ in New Neighbors](#) available at the Indiana Catholic Conference web site, indianacc.org.

### **Perceived Myth: Better border enforcement will solve the immigration problem**

#### **Known Fact:**

**From 1986 to 1998, the Border Patrol's budget increased six-fold and the number of agents stationed on our southwest border doubled to 8,500. From 1993 to 2004, spending for border enforcement nearly quadrupled. Yet, the number of unauthorized arrivals increased. Moreover, U.S. border enforcement strategies have channeled migrants to more remote crossing points, resulting in increased fatalities, a growth in smugglers and traffickers, and reduced chances of apprehension. Insufficient legal avenues for immigrants to enter the U.S., compared with the number of jobs in need of workers, have significantly contributed to this current conundrum.** (Source: Immigration and Naturalization website)

#### **Doesn't illegal immigration threaten our security?**

Some immigrants are illegal (undocumented) because they are denied entry for work or to be reunited with family. They seek to come legally but cannot because the law's limits are unrealistic. People wish to come to work, to make a life for themselves and their families, and to contribute to the well being of the community. They do not come to harm the U.S. or its citizens.

Others are illegal because their student or work visa has expired. While they may have a job they cannot change their status because of the backlog of requests and the limits (quota) for visas each year. The limits are reached usually within the first 2 months of the year. Even persons with professional degrees and experience are limited. The system must be changed and updated.

Border enforcement alone will not keep out persons determined to do harm. Only a policy that addresses the push and pull factors that compel most immigrants to come will enable border patrols to do their job. When border procedures allow for immigrants to come through regular channels the U.S. will be able to know who is here and why. Border agents will also be able to use resources to concentrate on those seeking entry outside the system, who may wish to do harm. The U.S. would be better protected with a policy that takes into consideration the reasons people immigrate.

### **Perceived Myth: Today's immigrants are different than those of 100 years ago**

**Known Fact:** The percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign-born now stands at 11.5%; in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was approximately 15%. Similar to accusations about today's immigrants, those of 100 years ago initially often settled in mono-ethnic neighborhoods, spoke their native languages, and built up newspapers and businesses that catered to their fellow émigrés. They also experienced the same types of discrimination that today's immigrants face, and integrated within American culture at a similar rate. If we view history objectively, we remember that every new wave of immigrants has been met with suspicion and doubt and yet, ultimately, every past wave of immigrants has been vindicated and saluted. (Source: Census Data)

### **Has immigration law changed over the years?**

Current immigration law has helped to create the present crisis. The problem is that current laws permit too few persons to enter to work or to be united with family members. The immigration system is broken and today's unrealistic low visa limits helps drive illegal immigration. The national economy requires more immigrant workers than are allowed to enter. The problem with not permitting access to work or to immigrate legally is that individuals are forced to stay once they make the treacherous trip here. Legal channels need to be widened to meet needs of today's realities.

Moreover, families often have long waits, sometimes up to 15 - 20 years to be reunited. For persons who desire permanent residence the time between application and admittance is unreasonable – in many countries such as Mexico and those in Central America the wait is 5 - 10 years. Even an individual married to a US citizen with children must wait years for their status to be clarified. Family reunification must be given greater priority.

It is also asserted that the new immigrants do not want to learn English or become Americans. But experience has shown that within ten years of arrival, more than 75% of immigrants speak English well; moreover, current demand for English classes at the adult level far exceeds supply. The children or second generation all speak English. Greater than 33% of immigrants are naturalized citizens; and given increased immigration this figure will rise as more legal permanent residents become eligible for naturalization in the coming years.

In the past the number of individuals permitted to enter was more realistic to meet the needs of legal immigrants and workers and to accommodate the economic needs of the country. The US is a nation of immigrants. We are also a nation of laws and our laws must be updated to meet today's needs and realities. Immigration is a Federal responsibility and Congress needs to act on comprehensive immigration reform. Comprehensive immigration reform on the national level is the solution.

### **Perceived Myth: Most immigrants cross the border illegally**

**Known Fact:** Around 75% of today's immigrants have legal permanent (immigrant) visas; of the 25% that are undocumented, 40% overstayed temporary (non-immigrant) visas. (Source: Department of Homeland Security)

**Immigrants in Indiana – number and work force**

According to the 2000 census 3.1 percent of Indiana residents are foreign born; residents totaled over 186,500. This includes those who are now citizens and those here as non-immigrants, such as refugees, students and workers with visas as well as the undocumented residents. Growth since 2000 is estimated to be approximately 68,000, raising the total to 4 percent of the total population.

***Immigrants other than Latino***

According to the 2000 census, immigrants in Indiana come from all continents and countries. 41.5 percent are from Latin America; 26.6 percent are from Asia; 23.2 percent from Europe; 4.2 percent from North America; 3.9 percent from Africa; and 0.5 percent from Oceania. Countries with the highest number of immigrants are Mexico, Germany, India, United Kingdom (England), China and Philippines.

**Why don't they just get the documents? Why do they break the law?**

Many undocumented immigrants come from desperate circumstances. Although it is difficult to leave one's home country and family, these individuals chose to leave their homes where there are limited job opportunities to improve the lives for their families, often to provide for basic human needs. Fathers, mothers are desperate to care for their family. Young men and women desire to work and they have a strong work ethic. Many businesses need workers and are interested in hiring these individuals, yet cannot hire willing workers with visas. For example, someone with requisite skills and with a job waiting may have to wait up to 5 years for the US to process a work visa.

These are people who need work and are willing to work hard. Although many immigrants work at lower paying jobs, the wages are more than they can earn in their home and the value of the dollar is such that even a little makes a big difference to the family who is left behind. For the immigrant it is a matter of life, one's own and one's family. Left with few options, desperation forces one to break civil law in order to fulfill natural law.