

**Migration Guidelines
from
Social Justice and Catholic Social Teaching**

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Story

There's a story about a town on a river that addresses the definition of social justice.

Children playing by the river saw three people floating in the water. One was dead and the townspeople gave him a nice burial. One was quite ill and they gave her free medical care. The third, a healthy child, was placed with a family who cared for it as one of their own.

The phenomena of the bodies in the river continued for years, and the townspeople were proud of their generosity in caring for all of them.

But nobody ever thought to go up the river to find out why, every day, bodies came floating down the river.

Townspeople were doing charity; doing justice never dawned on them.

Definitions of Social Justice

- the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within a society
- the idea of creating a society or institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being
- fair and proper administration of laws conforming to the natural law that all persons, irrespective of ethnic origin, gender, possessions, race, religion, etc., are to be treated equally and without prejudice

- Two of the seven key areas of "Catholic social teaching" are pertinent to social justice:
 - **Life and dignity of the human person:** The foundational principle of all "Catholic Social Teaching" is the sanctity of all human life and the inherent dignity of every human person. Human life must be valued above all material possessions.
 - **Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable:** Catholics believe Jesus taught that on the Day of Judgment God will ask what each person did to help the poor and needy: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." The Catholic Church believes that through words, prayers and deeds one must show solidarity with, and compassion for, the poor. The moral test of any society is "how it treats its most vulnerable members. The poor have the most urgent moral

claim on the conscience of the nation. People are called to look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor."

Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

- Catholic Social Teaching (also known as Catholic Social Doctrine) sums up the teachings of the Church on social justice issues. It promotes a vision of a just society that is grounded in the Bible and in the wisdom gathered from experience by the Christian community as it has responded to social justice issues through history.
- CST began in 1891 with Pope Leo XIII and his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*
- CST has been periodically updated as the world developed and changed
- Pope John Paul II very actively applied CST to our times
- Bishops from Mexico and USA jointly wrote a document about migration in 2003
 - *"Strangers No Longer—Together on the Journey of Hope"* (*"Ya No Somos Extranjeros—Juntos en el Camino de la Esperanza"*)
- **Introduction**
 - There is increased migration among peoples of the Americas
 - Many seeking to migrate are suffering, dying, having human rights abused, families kept apart, and are affected by racism and xenophobia (fear of strangers)
 - Bishops "seek to awaken our peoples to the mysterious presence of the crucified and risen Lord in the person of the migrant and to renew in them the values of the Kingdom of God that he proclaimed"
 - Bishops represent 90 million Mexican Catholics and 65 million U.S. Catholics
 - They wish to represent the migrants **as well as** land owners, and enforcement personnel without violating the dignity of the migrant
 - Civil and church structures are inadequate in both countries to meet the basic needs of the migrant
 - We judge ourselves as a community of faith by the way we treat the most vulnerable among us
 - They seek to measure the interests of **all** parties in the migration phenomenon
 - against the guidelines of Catholic social teaching
 - and to offer a moral framework for embracing, not rejecting, the reality of migration between our two nations
 - Migrants bear faith and culture
 - Bishops stand in solidarity with the migrants
- **Chapter I: America**
 - America is a continent born of immigrant people
 - Faith in Christ is the Heritage of all Americans
 - Fleeing injustice and oppression and seeking liberty and the opportunity to achieve a full life, many immigrants have found work, homes, security, liberty, and growth for themselves and their families
 - Mexico is a country of emigrants and immigrants
 - Newcomers offer new energy, hope, and cultural diversity

- U.S. government statistics
 - 800,000 Mexicans enter the U.S. each day (most return)
 - Each year the U.S. admits 150,000 to 200,000 Mexicans as legal permanent residents
 - A significant number of U.S. citizens live, work, and retire in Mexico
- **Chapter II: Word of God**
 - Old Testament
 - You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt (Ex. 23:9)
 - When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. 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... (Lv. 20:33-34)
 - So you too must befriend the alien... (Dt. 10:19)
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 - New Testament
 - Jesus, Mary, and Joseph migrated to Egypt and then back (Mt. 2:15)
 - 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)
 - Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me (Mt. 25:40)
 - [This is why we are involved; we are following a Gospel mandate!]
- **Chapter II: Catholic Social Teaching (CST) [on migration]**
 - CST defends the right to migrate; the root causes of migrations—poverty, injustice, religious intolerance, armed conflicts—must be addressed so that migrants can remain in their homeland and support their families
 - Affirms that all peoples have the right to conditions worthy of human life and, if these conditions are not present, the right to migrate (Pope Pius XII, *Exsul Familia*, 1952)
 - While recognizing the right of the sovereign state to control its borders, *Exsul Familia* also establishes that the right to migrate is not absolute, stating that the needs of immigrants must be measured against the needs of the receiving countries
 - The **obligation** of sovereign states is to promote the universal good, including an obligation to accommodate migration flow—more powerful nations have a stronger obligation (Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963)

- Refugee rights include the right to be reunited with their families and the right to a dignified occupation and just wage; the right to asylum must never be denied when people's lives are truly threatened in their homeland (Pope John Paul II)
- ¶32. Immigrants and their families have rights and the respect of human dignity "even in cases of **non-legal** immigration (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, 1999)
- Five principles emerge
 - Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland
 - Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families
 - Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders
 - Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection
 - The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected
- **Chapter III: Pastoral Challenges and Responses**
 - Church leaders at every level [not just clergy] are called to communicate this teaching grounded in Scriptures and CST
 - Conversion of mind and heart leads to
 - communion expressed through hospitality on the part of the receiving communities and a sense of belonging
 - and welcome on the part of those communities where migrants are arriving
 - The families of migrants...should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church (Pope John Paul II, World Migration Day 1993)