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Thoughts on Immigration Reform

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Biblical and Theological Foundations

As we consider the issue of immigration, we always need to begin in our thinking with the Bible. What does the Bible say ought to be the Christian's starting point for thinking about all of life?

Too often, in this highly politicized, highly polarized society we approach questions through the lenses of politics or economics, job security, family concerns, security concerns – and these things become the categories and lenses through which we approach a particular question. And in addition, too often our thinking is by the pundits – what does Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, or Rachel Maddow or some other person that we listen to say and think about a particular issue.

But we Christians ought to start all discussion from a different vantage point. The starting point for all of our thinking is what has God said – not what do my political affiliations say, not what do my fears say, not what did I read the other day in the paper – but, what does God say?

When I think about biblical and theological foundations there are at least 4-5 issues that immediately arise.

1. Human beings are made in the image of God.

We human beings are different than the rest of creation. When God made all of creation we read in Genesis 1 that God saw that “it was good.” **But after the creation of human beings, Genesis 1 declares, “and it was very good” (Gen. 1.31).** This is the seventh occurrence of the word “good” in Genesis 1. Seven is a special number in the Bible. It represents perfection. And when we combine the superlative “very good” to the fact that this is the seventh mention of goodness, we see that human beings are the crown of God’s creation.

There is much discussion about what it means to be made in the image of God. Certainly, part of what it means is that we represent God to the rest of creation. We are to care for and watch over God’s creation. And certainly another part of being made in the image of God is that we have a unique relationship with God as compared to even the most intelligent of other animals. All of this tells us that people are valuable. Each and every human being has inherent worth and dignity. And every other human being is worthy of our respect.

Now, the fact that each human being, including immigrants, are made in the image of God suggests several lines of thinking for us.

a. We Christians ought to be extremely sensitive to our language about other people. James 3.9 says, “*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness.*”

Language is huge in terms of communicating what we see another person as imaging God to us. There are few things more troublesome to me than reading an article or a forwarded email that speaks about an immigrant man or woman or child as a parasite or a pariah or wetback or merely as “an illegal.” There is a lot of language that is both overtly slanderous as well as full of code. For example, immigrants are described as “third world invaders” who come to America to destroy our heritage and attack “our way of life.” Immigrants are described as part of hordes that swarm over the border. This kind of dehumanizing language has become common.

Immigrants are betrayed as carriers of disease like leprosy, tuberculosis, polio, and malaria. Immigrants are depicted as criminals, murderers, rapists, terrorists and a danger to children and family. Conspiracy theories are thrown about an alleged secret “reconquista” plot by Mexican immigrants to create a greater Mexico by seizing seven states in the American Southwest that once belonged to Mexico. Talk radio has promoted this.

Who are we talking about here? We’re talking about the image of God. So we have to be careful in our words and in our arguments.

The second line of thinking that proceeds from human beings being made in the image of God is an extended discussion about:

b. The foundation of human rights.

Why should a human being be treated in a certain fashion? What is the ground, the foundation, for not killing another human being, or stealing from another human being, or raping a woman, or performing medical experiments upon another person? Why don't we do these things? Is the ground of our treatment of other human beings merely positive law, the legal system of each country or state? Or is there a deeper foundation for human rights?

We could easily spend months on this issue alone. But to put it in a nutshell, Christian thinkers suggest that there is a deeper foundation for our treatment of each other than merely legislative action or social contract, or utilitarian concerns – the greatest good for the greatest number of folks, or cost benefit analysis. Christian thinkers say we treat each other in a certain fashion because we are made in God's image. So our rights go beyond the laws of individual countries.

2. God's Love for Humanity

The second basic foundation for thinking about immigration is God's love for humanity shown to us supremely in the death of Christ for everyone. So we read

in 1 John 2.2, ***“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world.”***

And we read in 1 Timothy 2:3-6

3This is good, and pleases God our Savior,

4who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

5For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human,

6who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

Christ didn't merely die for a particular ethnic group or people group, or people of a certain caste. God loves all men, women, and children and God sent his Son to die for all men, women, and children.

When we think about immigrants we say, therefore, that this person is not only made in the image of God and thus deserving of respect and dignity, but this person is someone who God loves and for whom Christ died.

3. Love of Neighbor

A third foundation for thinking about immigration is the Old and New Testament command to ***“love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19.18)***. But does the immigrant fall in the category of my neighbor to whom I owe love? Even as far

back as the Law of Moses we read in the same chapter that gave us this command to love your neighbor as yourself these words:

Leviticus 19:33-34

33“ When foreigners reside among you in your land, do not mistreat them.

34The foreigners residing among you must be treated as your native-born.

Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Of course, Jesus underlines this command to love our neighbor by making it one of the two great commands in

Matthew 22:34-40

34Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

35One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:

36“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

38This is the first and greatest commandment.

39And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

40All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

And Jesus in one of the most famous stories ever told, the story of the Good Samaritan, responds to a lawyer’s attempt to restrict the definition of neighbor to

one's own tribe, or one's own ethnicity, one's own national group. We find in the story of the Good Samaritan that our neighbor might be a person who is of an entirely different grouping. Indeed, the grouping that we find our neighbor in might be a despised and disliked grouping. The rest of society around us might say that this grouping is made up of parasites, cheaters, gate-crashers. But Jesus says that we are to approach everyone as a neighbor, with love.

Applying this to immigrants we realize that we must approach immigrants with the following thoughts. This person is first of all made in the image of God. Second, this person is someone who God loves and for whom Christ died. And third, this person is my neighbor who I am commanded to love.

4. Our Identity

A fourth foundational principle for thinking about immigration is a consideration of our own identity as the people of God. Now, this consideration goes in two directions. First, God's people always ought to see themselves as an immigrant people. We'll discuss this a little more in a moment. But God's chosen people, Israel, were commanded to recite this creed as their fundamental self-identity in

a. We are immigrants.

Deuteronomy 26:5

5Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous.,

This runs throughout the Old Testament. So we see, for example, this statement in Ps 39.12,

Ps 39:12

12“Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping. I dwell with you as a foreigner, a stranger, as all my ancestors were.

In the same way, we Christians are to see ourselves as sojourners and aliens, recipients of the letter of 1 Peter called strangers.

1 Pe 1:1

1Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

And Peter later on calls them aliens and strangers in the world.

1 Pe 2:11

11Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

So when we look at an immigrant, we don't see someone essentially different from us. No matter how long your family has been present in a certain location, if you are a Christian, you are an immigrant, you are a foreigner, and you are exactly like the people who would label themselves as immigrants.

b. Christians and National Identity

And this self-identification as immigrant leads to a second line of thinking. That is that the Christian holds their national identity with a looser grip than does the rest of society. Because you are an immigrant, because you are an alien, because, more importantly according to the Apostle Paul, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3.20), the Christian can never see themselves as merely an American, or merely French, or Korean, Mexican or Kenyan. Our citizenship is in heaven. It is to the God of heaven that we give our fundamental allegiance. Any allegiances in this world, including national allegiances, are merely provisional. They are temporary and subject to critique. National borders and immigration systems are not absolutes, at least not for the Christian.

5. Christians are called to hospitality

The fifth foundation stone of thinking about immigration is the enormous amount of biblical material on hospitality. We certainly see the practice of hospitality throughout the Old Testament. In the New Testament hospitality is underlined as a fundamental Christian value. Meals were shared; shelter was provided to Christians and non-Christians, to friends, family and strangers. This is what we read in Hebrews 13.2.

Heb 13:2

2Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

a. Philoxenia v. Xenophobia

Now the word for entertaining strangers or in other versions, practicing hospitality, is the Greek word “philoxenia.” Hospitality literally means love of the stranger. Philoxenia is the exact opposite of xenophobia. To be xenophobic, to have an aversion to foreigners, or to reject people because they are not our kind, to limit the blessings of one’s country to people like themselves is an impossible position for the Christian. We are called to philoxenia, not xenophobia.

Old Testament Teaching on Immigration

1. A Vulnerable Group in Need of Protection

The English word “alien” in the Old Testament most commonly translates the Hebrew word “ger,” but also on occasion the Hebrew word “zar” or “nokri”. We find the Hebrew word “ger” only 21 times. It has been translated variously as “alien,” “sojourner,” “stranger,” “foreigner,” “non-Israelite,” “immigrant,” “temporary resident,” “resident alien,” “foreign resident.” In short, the ger was a person not native to the local area – someone who had no family or land there. This led to the basic structure of Old Testament thought regarding aliens and that is that they were a vulnerable group and needed the protection of the law. As the

Dictionary of the Old Testament states: “The pentateuchal laws regarding aliens demonstrate a clear humanitarian concern, including guarantees of even-handed justice without prejudice to their status, fair payment of wages, gleaning rights to the leftover harvest, other provisions of food from the triennial tithe, include in feasts alongside the orphan and widow, and inclusion in the Sabbath rest.”

So the stranger and foreigner are often classed alongside the widow and orphan as needing special protection. Indeed, God is seen as God of the widow, the orphan and the alien.

Dt 10:18

18He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigners residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

2. Who is the alien?

a. All Israelites

According to the Old Testament it is not merely the non-Israelite who is seen as an alien or immigrant. The Pentateuch applies the word “ger” to Israelites whenever they find themselves in a comparable situation of temporary residence with no land and no established family support network. Thus, for the Israelites, it is applied to their long experience in Egypt (see e.g. Exodus 22.21; Leviticus 19.34; Deuteronomy 23.7).

The significance of the Israelites self-identification as immigrants has to do with the way that they then are to treat non-Israelites. So, for example, Exodus 23.9 says:

Ex 23:9

9“Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

And we read in Deuteronomy 10.18-19,

Dt 10:18-19

18He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigners residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

19And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

The prohibition of mistreating non-Israelite foreigners is grounded in self-identification of Israel as a nation of immigrants. (This has huge application to our own self-identification as Americans. Unlike almost every other country of the face of the earth, we Americans have historically understood ourselves as a “nation of immigrants.” How should that impact the way we treat immigrants?)

b. The Patriarchs

Not only did Israel identify itself a nation of foreigners, but the patriarchs all carried this status. Each of the patriarchs individually was called by the term “ger.” It applies to Abraham (Gen. 17.7-8), Lot (Gen. 19.9), Isaac (Gen. 35.27), Jacob (Gen. 28.4), Esau (Gen. 36.6-6) and Joseph and his brothers collectively (Gen. 47.4 and 9). Abraham applied the term to himself among the Hittites at Hebron when he sought to purchase a burial plot for his wife saying:

Ge 23:4

4“I am a foreigner and stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead.”

They were nomadic wanderers. Moses was called “ger” with respect to his time in Midian (Ex. 2.22).

The reason for the movement of the patriarchs and the nation of Israel is varied. Abram and his extended family left Ur of the Chaldeans at God’s command and went to the land of Canaan. But they were not permanently settled in one place. They lived a nomadic life. Abram and his family frequently moved because of famine. Not long after arriving in Canaan, Abram journeyed down to Egypt (Gen. 12.10) because of a famine in the land. Likewise, Isaac moved to Philistine country because of a famine (Gen. 26.1) and Jacob sent his sons twice to Egypt to buy food because of famine. Eventually he and his family had to move to Egypt. Ruth was driven by famine to move to another country. And then Ruth, the Moabitess moves to the Promised Land where she, an immigrant, becomes

part of the lineage of King David and ultimately part of the lineage of the greater King: Messiah Jesus.

c. Why were the Israelites immigrants?

On occasion the Israelites moved because they were forced to as a result of exile. So Daniel was taken from Jerusalem along with many other Israelites. Others were forced to move because they were the victims of war or the victims of political persecution. Moses escaped from Egypt after killing a taskmaster and settled in Midian. While he was in Midian, he married his wife, Zipporah, and they have a son together named Gershom, saying, "I have become a sojourner in a foreign land " (Ex 2.22). The boy's name is a word play on the Hebrew word "ger," sojourner. David flees for his life from the persecution of King Saul and entered another land, the land of the Philistines.

d. Looking for the Promised Land

What we see throughout the Old Testament is that for exiled Israel there is always the hope of returning to the Promised Land. This is what burned in the hearts of many of the Jews in exile to come back from Babylon and Persia. And what we see among many of the Old Testament stories is that these ger, these immigrants, are tested in their places of exile. They are discriminated against. They want to have a home; they want to provide for their families; they want to worship God. They are gifted in different fields of work.

Many of these immigrant stories are stories of men and women who arise to positions of great authority, great prominence. They do extraordinary things for the country that they're living in. But they long for the Promised Land.

And I think, by way of application of most of the folks who come to America, they are looking for a Promised Land here. They're looking for a land of milk and honey; a place of security and provision for their families. Many of today's immigrants see themselves and their stories woven into the narrative of scripture.

e. Laws Protecting the Immigrant

Now, as we continue to survey the Old Testament, we, of course, have to take account of the many, many laws in the Old Testament dealing with immigrants. God prescribes fair treatment for the ger (the alien) in legal pursuits. He prohibits oppression of the ger and says that the alien is entitled to Sabbath rest.

1. Sabbath

Ex 23:12

12“Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the foreigner among you as well, may be refreshed.

2. Civil and Criminal Law

In legal matters with few exceptions, the alien was generally to be treated the same as the native Israelite, or maybe even with greater consideration. It is very

surprising and in an ancient civilization God prescribes equal treatment under the law in both civil and criminal law. Now, religious law was different and foreigners were separated out ceremonially from the Israelites. They couldn't come into the Temple. They couldn't offer sacrifices. They couldn't become priests. But in terms of civil and criminal law, there was an equal application of the law. So we read in Leviticus 24.22, concerning the criminal law:

Le 24:22

22You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the Lord your God.' ”

3. Tort Law

And in terms of personal injury laws, the same law applied to both Israelites and non-Israelites. We would call that tort law today.

4. Cities of Refuge

In fact, the Old Testament sets up cities of refuge for individuals to flee to, if they killed another person accidentally. What you may not know is that the cities of refuge were available not just for Israelites, but very surprisingly in an ancient society, they were available for non-Israelites as well.

Nu 35:15

15These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites and for foreigners residing among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.

5. Some Religious Laws

Some religious laws applied to the ger, for example, dietary restrictions during the Passover and eating blood and various laws on sexuality. Aliens were allowed and sometimes required to participate and benefit in Israelite feasts including the Day of Atonement when both native born and resident aliens were to fast and refrain from work because atonement was being made not only for Jews, but for the ger.

Le 16:29-30

29“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work—whether native-born or a foreigner residing among you—

30because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.

It is not that there weren't differences. But equal treatment under the law was the general approach of the Old Testament to aliens and foreigners.

f. The Practice of Hospitality

Finally, as I mentioned before, the issue of hospitality comes up over and over again in the Old Testament. The ger along with widows and orphans are accorded special consideration in providing for their basic needs for food, shelter,

and protection from injustice. The gleanings of the harvest and the leftover fallen grapes were reserved for the poor and the alien.

Le 19:10

10Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.

Le 23:22

22“ When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the Lord your God.’ ”

New Testament Teaching on Immigration

1. Jesus the Refugee

In the New Testament we encounter Jesus as a refugee. Joseph, Mary and the Baby Jesus had to flee from Herod the Great's homicidal rage. So they went to Egypt. Likely, they went to Alexandria where there was a large Jewish population. They stayed in Egypt perhaps for two years. They were unable to return to their ancestral home and so Joseph took the family northward and returned once more to Nazareth and Galilee.

2. Jesus' Concern for Outsiders

Jesus continually demonstrated concern for the outsider. In one of his most famous encounters we find Jesus in Samaria. The text says in John 4.4,

Jn 4:4

4Now he had to go through Samaria.

Jesus felt a divine necessity to put himself into relationship with foreigners, with Samaritans. The meeting with the Samaritan woman was not just some unplanned, fortuitous happening. Rather, it was part of the predetermined plan of God. He deliberately takes water from her vessel which would make him ritually impure. He crossed cultural taboos. It is really important to note that the first person to whom Jesus reveals himself plainly as the Messiah is this Samaritan woman. Samaritans are referred to positively in Jesus' story of the ten lepers in Luke 17, who are calling out to him for healing. Jesus heals the ten and tells them to show themselves to the priest. Only one of them returns, Jesus notes, and he was a Samaritan, a foreigner. And, of course, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan.

It is interesting that Jesus repeatedly sites the example of immigrants, foreigners, as being models for kind of people that God wants in his Kingdom.

3. Jesus: The Ultimate Immigrant

Finally, and probably most significantly from a New Testament perspective is Jesus says he comes to us in the guise of the immigrant. Jesus says in Matthew 25:34-26,

Mt 25:34-36

34“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

35For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

36I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

When we do something for an immigrant, Jesus says, we are doing it for him.

Mt 25:40

40“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Who are the least of these brothers and sisters of mine? Some commentators very idiosyncratically I think say by the least of these brothers and sisters Jesus is referring to the Jewish people, or to Christian missionaries. I don't find that in the text. More convincing is the possibility that Jesus is referring to Christians in

general, but most convincing of all, I think, is that Jesus is talking about everyone in need whether Christian or not. The least of these brothers and sisters of mine, I believe, along with commentators throughout the history of the church, includes everyone in need. Jesus is talking about fellow human beings, someone who shares our common humanity, someone who is made in the image of God, someone who is our neighbor, someone for whom he died. And he is saying, “I identify with that person. So when you do something for them, you do it for me.”

The Current Immigration Debate

Anti-Immigration Groups: F.A.I.R., Numbers USA, and John Tantan

There is a national debate going on about what to do regarding immigration and the more than 12 million people who are not legally in the United States right now.

As a result of the fear of Arizonans, President Obama promised to send 1200 more National Guard troops to the border. There have been recent border incidents of Mexican men being shot by border patrol guards. There have also been huge rallies in Los Angeles, Chicago, and more recently in Phoenix protesting current American immigration policy especially the roundups.

Contrary to popular perception more people will be deported under Barak Obama than under President Bush, if present trends continue.

Politicians are getting hammered about immigration. John McCain, who was a strong supporter of Comprehensive Immigration Reform and a co-sponsor of the

McCain-Kennedy Immigration Reform Bill back in 2007, has completely reversed his position in 2010. More anti-immigrant sentiment is spreading across the nation. A city in Nebraska recently passed an anti-immigrant city ordinance.

On the one side you have anti-immigrant groups like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). FAIR is among the most widely quoted organization discussing immigration policy and was behind SB1070, the Arizona law. In fact, they wrote the law. Another well-known anti-immigrant group is Numbers USA.

These groups got their early funding from a man named John Tantan, who by his own admission funded almost all the major national organizations promoting anti-immigrant agendas. Tantan owns a little publishing company called “The Social Contract Press” in which he publishes the views of white nationalists such as John Vinson, who argues about how God prefers racial separation. Yet, the popular press quotes groups like FAIR and Numbers USA as being grass-roots efforts, David vs. Goliath. They don’t connect it to the roots which are decidedly racist.

How Does Someone Enter the US Legally?

Everyone admits that our current immigration law is broken. Many people wonder why immigrants don’t simply wait their turn in line in order to come into the US legally. For some folks, I think the picture that is in their mind’s eye is going to the Post Office or an Embassy in their particular home country, filling out some forms, and then waiting to be legally processed.

We need to understand that there are only four legal ways to obtain lawful, permanent resident status in the United States.

1. Family-Based Immigration

a. A US citizen may bring in their spouse, unmarried children under the age of 21, and parents. There is no real limit on this.

But because of backlogs there are waiting periods to bring in spouses, unmarried children under the age of 21 and parents.

If, however, your child is over the age of 21 or is married, or we're talking about your brother and sister, there are strict numerical limits and backlogs can last as long as 22 years. There is no family immigration provision for grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, or cousins.

b. Legal Residents and Family Immigration

Under Family Immigration, if a person is a legal resident, that is, they have their so-called Green Card; there is a huge backlog to bring in family members such as their spouses or children. On average there is about a 7 year wait to bring in your spouse, if you are a legal permanent resident here, but not yet a US citizen. For many spouses and parents being separated from their wife or husband, or their kids for 7 years is simply too long to bear. That's why so many folks are illegal. They find family separation to be too crushing a burden.

2. Employment-Based Immigration: Skilled v. Unskilled Labor

There is an employment-based immigration system, but this also has strict visa limits. There are employment-based visas almost exclusively reserved for those with advanced degrees and extraordinary abilities. But for unskilled workers, professions like nannies, gardeners, restaurant workers, how many visas do you think are available for unskilled workers to legally enter the country? America provides 66,000 visas a year for unskilled workers.

Now, it is not as much of an issue when the economy is down, but when our economy was humming along a couple of years ago, there was a gross mismatch between the number of visas issued by the country and the demand for unskilled labor. For years our economy was demanding 500,000 unskilled workers each year and we were issuing 66,000 visas.

3. Asylum-Based Immigration: Who is a Refugee?

There are a limited number of refugees, or asylum-seekers that are allowed into America. Asylum seekers are those fleeing persecution because of race, religion, national origin, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. But their fear of persecution must be well-founded and there are five very stringent tests for determining whether someone is truly a refugee or an asylum seeker.

We do not grant refugee status for those fleeing poverty, natural disasters, or environmental degradation. So, just because there might be massive starvation in Ethiopia, or an earthquake in Haiti, or a terrible flood in Bangladesh, does not turn someone into a refugee according to US law. They are simply not permitted in legally, even though they are starving to death in their own country.

4. Diversity Lottery System: Under v. Over-Represented Countries

There is a Diversity Lottery system in which people in other countries can apply for a visa to America based on a lottery system. The odds of winning the lottery are about 1 in 200. But the lottery only works for under-represented countries, not for those from Mexico, the Philippines, China, India and other so-called over-represented countries.

Now you see why we might begin to have a problem. There is a push-pull going on with immigrants. People are being pushed by a desire to reconnect with family members, or they're pushed by economic need, or pushed by a desire to have a better life. And then they are pulled by American agri-businesses, corporations, meat-packing plants, hotels, motels, restaurants. And America sends these contradictory signals to immigrants: green light – come in, we want you to work and serve us; red light – if you come in illegally, you will be deported.

Who are the Illegal Immigrants?

It is estimated that there are about 12 million illegal immigrants. Interestingly, 40% of illegals entered the country legally, but have overstayed their visas. A

little over half are from Mexico. 22% are from the rest of Latin America primarily Central America. Somewhere around 75% of all of the illegals come from Mexico and the rest of Latin America. The face of immigration is not simply Hispanic especially among those who have entered the country legally. It is also African, Asian, and European. About half of illegal immigrants live as families – mom, dad, and children. So the illegal immigrant population is far more family-centered than is the rest of America. Only about 21% of Americans live as mom, dad, and children in a residence.

Pro-Comprehensive Immigration Reform arguments

1. Immigration is a family issue.

Husbands are separated from their wives. Parents are separated from their children and children from their parents. Parents have been rounded up and deported while their children were attending preschool.

2. Comprehensive Immigration Reform is Not Amnesty

Amnesty is what Jimmy Carter did with those young men who fled this country for Canada in order to avoid service in Viet Nam. He simply let them back into the country without any penalty and without any required service to America. What left such a bad taste in the mouth of many Viet Nam vets and many other Americans was the absence of any accountability. If Carter had said, instead, that in order to come back into the United States a young man must give the country two years of service in Teach For America or some other civilian service, most folks would have said, "That makes sense. We welcome these kids back in

from Canada on the basis of their willingness to pay a penalty and to offer some service.”

It is the same thing with Comprehensive Immigration Reform. What is not being suggested by the vast majority of immigrant advocacy is amnesty. What is being suggested instead is an earned pathway to citizenship. That earned pathway has a number of components.

Some Proposed Elements of an Earned Pathway to Citizenship

- 1. Registration with the government to bring people out the shadows.**
- 2. Those registered have to pass a background check and not have criminal convictions on their records and pay a financial penalty for being in the country illegally.**
- 3. Learn English and pass a citizenship test.**
- 4. Pay back taxes and keep taxes current.**
- 5. Have clear employment verification systems in place including non-forgeable Social Security cards perhaps containing biometric information. Employers would incur severe penalties for hiring unauthorized immigrants.**
- 6. Beef up security on the border.**
- 7. Determine future flow of how many people are needed in the future in America to work here. We need a coherent policy.**
- 8. Investment in backlog reduction. There are nearly 6 million people in our system.**

3. Enforcement-Only Doesn't Work

A member of the President's cabinet once made the following really important observation. If we take an enforcement-only approach and decide to build a 20' wall around America, we will immediately see people carrying 21' ladders.

Human nature tells us that enforcement-only approaches cannot work. We've put more resources on the ground in the last 10 years – more boots and binoculars, but we have not been able to solve the problem. We have more undocumented workers than ever. We need a comprehensive approach to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. We have to pay attention to family reunification. We've got to reduce backlog. We've got to have strict employment enforcement.

Right now, we do not have a level playing field. The bad guys, the really nasty employers, who are exploiting illegals, have set up a system in which illegals are paid less than minimum wage and where American workers are being hurt by unfair competition from low paid illegal immigrants. We need a level playing field and the strict enforcement of immigration laws with employers.

Further, the notion that we must do this sequentially – first secure the borders and then deal with comprehensive reform – is, in my opinion, like saying first we need to get the blood flowing in our patient and only then should we give the patient oxygen. We can't think sequentially about the immigration problem. We need to think about it in systemic terms – every thing is related to every thing

else – family reunification, employment, border control, non-forgable documents
– it's all related.

Poll Data on American Perceptions of Immigration Reform

A new national poll was conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute that was released March 23, 2010 and updated April 14, 2010. Here are some of the salient facts:

- **By a 2-1 margin Americans strongly support a comprehensive approach to immigration reform.** So while the majority of Americans say they support the Arizona law, that figure has to be looked at more closely. A majority of Americans support the Arizona law as compared to nothing. But when comparing an enforcement-only type law to comprehensive immigration reform, by a 2-1 margin Americans strongly support a comprehensive approach to immigration reform.
- **More than 8 in 10 Americans including overwhelming majorities of white, mainline Protestants, Catholics, and white evangelicals believe that immigration reform should be guided by the values of protecting the dignity of every person and keeping families together as well as such values as promoting national security and ensuring fairness to tax payers.**
- **Nearly 9 in 10 Americans, 86%, favor a policy that includes one of the key provisions of Comprehensive Immigration Reform – that illegal**

immigrants be required to register with the government, work, pay taxes, and learn English before having the opportunity to apply for citizenship.

- **A majority of Americans, 56%, say the immigration system is completely broken, or mostly broken. Only 7% say the system is working.**

Now, here is a really interesting statistic:

- **Only 1 in 4 Americans have heard their pastor speak about the issue of immigration even occasionally.** Catholics who attend services regularly are most likely to hear about the issue in church.
- **Only 1 in 6 white evangelicals report hearing about the issue of immigration from their pastor.**
- 6 in 10 religious Americans say they would be very comfortable or somewhat comfortable with their clergy discussing the issue in the congregation's newsletter. And an even larger majority says they would be comfortable with their clergy talking about the issue in an adult education session. 74% at a local community meeting. 77% in the local media.

Here is the summary of the data:

- **When the elements of Comprehensive Immigration Reform were tested against a different opposing argument, one advocating the deportation of illegal immigrants to their home countries, nearly 2/3 (65%) say they prefer the immigration reform policy that allows an opportunity for citizenship.** Only 3 in 10 Americans support a position that entails denying social services to illegal immigrants and deporting them back to their home countries.
- **There are no significant differences by religious affiliation for or against Comprehensive Immigration Reform.** Religious groups across the spectrum support comprehensive approaches over opposing arguments roughly by a 2 to 1 margin. Thus white evangelicals are similar to white mainline and white Roman Catholics regarding supporting an earned path to citizenship by a 2 to 1 majority.
- **Pastors and churches rarely talk about immigration according to the survey.**
- **Congregation members would welcome more discussion regarding immigration in their churches.**

Anti-Immigrant Arguments

The Arizona Immigration Policy

Arizona recently passed a law which is popularly known as SB1070 requiring the police to check the documents of anyone they stop or detain whom they suspect of being in the country illegally. A majority of Americans said that they agree with the Arizona law. People are frustrated that the Federal Government hasn't taken any action to deal with the immigration issue. Governor Brewer said we have to trust our law enforcement. Police officers are going to be respectful. They understand what their jobs are; they've taken an oath and racial profiling isn't legal.

Those words ring hollow for many Latinos in Arizona. So, for example, one judge, Judge Hosea Padea of Maricopa County Superior Court, said twice since he became a judge in 2006 the police have pulled him over alleging minor traffic infractions and demanding proof of citizenship. A number of factors can be used to make an immigration inquiry according to the training manuals given to Arizona police including:

- Does the subject have a thick foreign accent or appear not to speak English?
- Does the subject's appearance look like it is "out of place" or as though the subject has just traveled?
- Is the area known for its attraction to illegal immigrants?

Many legal Latino residents believe that the law creates too much room for harassment and the singling out of Latinos for questionable stops. Some

celebrities have chosen to boycott Arizona. Mayor Coleman announced that he is going to cut down on business with Arizona.

Other states are following the Arizona example. So the Nebraska city of Fremont voted to ban undocumented people from taking jobs or renting property. President Obama's Justice Department has plans to file suit to strike down the Arizona law. Our local city council has endorsed a resolution calling on Congress to enact a uniformed national policy on immigration rather than a piecemeal approach.

Arizona is also currently considering the denial of US citizenship to American-born children of illegal immigrants – something that would be a first in American history since the passage of the post-Civil War Constitutional Amendments guaranteeing American citizenship to all who are born in the United States.

Anti-immigrant groups like the Federation for Immigration Reform (FAIR) and the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) argue that:

- **Immigrants are causing crime and violence**
- **Immigrants are altering the nation's cultural identity**
- **Immigrants don't pay taxes**
- **Immigrants come here to take welfare**
- **Immigrants take jobs and opportunities away from Americans**
- **Immigrants don't want to learn English or become Americans**
- **Weak US border enforcement led to high undocumented immigration**

- **Immigrants enter the US simply to have children born in the US.**
- **Immigrants broke the law; they should not be rewarded by allowing them to stay.**
- **My relatives (grandfather, great-grandfather) came here legally and so should these new immigrants.**
- **Providing legal status to undocumented immigrants will penalize immigrants who play by the rules and wait in line.**

RESPONSES

1. Immigrants are causing crime and violence.

Because the Federal Government has refused to tackle this issue, there is an enormous debate going on about what to do with all of these illegal immigrants. On the one side, there has been documented violence along the border. The case of Robert Krentz, who is a mild-mannered rancher who was shot to death on his vast property, has been told, and told, and retold by Arizona law makers and the Governor of Arizona in passing their strict enforcement only policy.

(Columbus Dispatch Editorial by Linda Chavez, July 6, 2010)

Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer, for example, made the outrageous claim recently that "we all know that the majority of the people that are coming to Arizona and trespassing are now becoming drug mules. They're coming across our borders in huge numbers." But the facts don't bear her out. So let's examine some facts:

- *Illegal immigration is down, not up.* Since mid-decade, illegal immigration at the Mexican border has declined drastically. Border apprehensions - one of the most consistent and accurate measures of illegal traffic - are at a 35-year low, down 54 percent since 2005. The peak period of illegal immigration, 1995-2000, coincided with a major expansion in the U.S. economy, with jobs plentiful. Indeed, the 2008 recession and slow recovery have been as big a factor as beefed-up border security in reducing illegal immigration.

- *Illegal immigration has not led to an increase in crime, nationally or in the communities in which large numbers of illegal immigrants reside.* The popular perception that illegal immigration equals increased crime is one of the most persistent reasons many fear that illegal immigration is causing untold hardship to Americans. But crime in the U.S. has been declining over the past two decades, even while illegal immigration was increasing.

According to the latest FBI Uniform Crime Reports, overall crime declined nationally for the 16th straight year, with violent crime down 5.5 percent in 2009. And the figures for Arizona - ground zero in the immigration debate and the state that experiences the largest influx of illegal immigrants into the U.S. - show that violent crime has been falling steadily and is lower now than at any point since 1972. In Phoenix, violent crime declined by about 10 percent.

- *Half of the 10 lowest-crime big cities in the U.S. are in border states: El Paso, San Jose, Austin, San Diego and Los Angeles; and two others, New York and Denver, are home to large illegal immigrant populations, as well.* The crime

statistics for El Paso are perhaps the most surprising. The city is the second-safest big city in America, according to FBI data, with a population that is 82 percent Hispanic, including nearly 30 percent who are immigrants, many of them illegal. What's more, El Paso sits just across the river from one of the most dangerous places on the planet, Ciudad Juarez. The drug-cartel crime that has driven murders in Juarez to make it the murder capital of the world - an appalling 242 in May alone - has not spilled over onto the streets of El Paso.

- *The U.S. Border Patrol has more resources than ever, and patrolling the Mexican border is far safer than most law-enforcement jobs.* There are now more than 20,000 Border Patrol agents, making the agency the largest law-enforcement contingent in the federal government. According to a Customs and Border Protection study, violent attacks against Border Patrol agents declined in 2009, and attacks against agents are far lower per capita than those against police officers and sheriffs, 3 percent compared to 11 percent, with the attacks against border agents consisting mostly of rock-throwing, while gun and knife attacks were the predominant assaults against police.

Judith Ganz, who studies immigration at the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy at the University of Arizona said that what social psychologists call self-serving perception bias, seems to be at play regarding the perception that illegals are committing many, many crimes. Ms. Ganz said, "If an illegal immigrant commits a crime, this confirms our view that illegal immigrants are criminals. If an illegal immigrant doesn't commit a crime, either they just didn't get caught, or

it is a flock of the situation.” Ms. Ganz noted that sponsors of Arizona’s controversial immigration enforcement law have made careers of promising to rid the state of illegal immigrants through tough legislation. “Their repeated characterization of illegal immigrants as criminals – easy to do since they broke immigration laws – makes it easy for people to ignore statistics. It takes only one well-publicized crime like Mr. Krentz’s shooting to drive up fear.”

2. Immigrants are altering the nation’s cultural identity

The fear of altering the culture of America is a common American fear dating all the way back to the 1840’s and 1850’s. The Know Nothing movement was a nativist American political movement empowered by popular fears that the country was being overwhelmed by German and Irish Catholic immigrants, who were considered to be hostile to Protestant Anglo-Saxon values and were supposedly controlled by the Pope in Rome. So they were seen as disloyal to America. They didn’t speak English and they were going to alter America’s fundamental character.

The origin of the phrase Know Nothing was the semi-secret organization of the party. When a member was asked about its activities he was supposed to reply, “I know nothing.” But the basic fear was that America was being taken over by a foreign element of non-English speakers, who would not be assimilated easily into the United States. This foreign element was part of a larger plot of the Catholic Pope to subjugate the United States to the papacy.

Nativist sentiments erupted again in the 1880's as the result of the influx of Chinese immigrants, and then between 1910 and 1920 as the result of the flood of Eastern European and Southern European immigrants, particularly Jews and Italians. It was said that these groups would fundamentally alter the culture of America; that they were different than prior waves of immigrants. They carried diseases; prone to crime.

Response:

Like every previous group of newcomers immigrants today will eventually assimilate into the culture. Hispanics exhibit and inter-marriage rate ten times higher than those of white Americans. Most immigrants are more religious than the average American; more family-oriented than the average American; and, generally hold conservative values concerning abortion, homosexuality, work, etc.

3. Immigrants don't pay taxes.

In fact, immigrants pay taxes in the form of income property sales, taxes at the federal and state level, as well as social security taxes. As far as income tax payments go, there are varying accounts. **The range of studies find that immigrants pay between \$90-100 billion dollars a year in federal, state and local taxes.**

a. Social Security Taxes

Many undocumented workers use a false social security card to acquire work. Payroll taxes are then deducted and sent to the Social Security Administration.

The government realizes that the money it is receiving out of such paychecks doesn't match any valid social security number. It receives about \$6-7 billion dollars a year in no match social security contributions which it acknowledges comes primarily from unauthorized immigrants. But the government is clearly not concerned about taking immigrants' money and not giving them benefits. As the book *Welcoming The Stranger* points out, it is probably not coincidental that the social security card, unlike most government documents like a driver's license or passport, employs very little modern technology that would make it difficult to falsify. In fact, it looks like they are made on blue construction paper with a typewriter.

The reason there is no verification system for social security numbers is because there is not a political will to stop collecting social security taxes from illegal immigrants while giving them no benefits.

It is the case that many immigrants are paid under the table, but most studies indicate that somewhere between three quarters of all undocumented immigrants (the Social Security Administration estimates 3 out of 4) do have social security, Medicare, and income taxes deducted from their payroll.

b. Income Taxes

Many undocumented immigrants actually file tax returns each year. Their false social security numbers are not valid for filing taxes. But the Internal Revenue offers special individual taxpayer identification numbers (ITINs) to those who don't have valid social security numbers with a commitment that the IRS will not communicate with the immigration authorities.

“We want your money whether you are here legally or not, and whether you earned it legally or not,” the IRS Commissioner Mike Evers told the New York Times in 2007.

Since 1996 when ITINs first became available, more than a million numbers have been issued. A few years ago more than \$5 billion was collected under the ITINs system in federal taxes alone.

A study by Stephen Moore, an economist at the Libertarian Cato Institute, suggests that the average immigrant pays about \$80,000 more in taxes than he or she receives in benefits over a lifetime. The problem is the distribution of these taxes is somewhat skewed. The net benefit to the federal government is about \$105,000 over a lifetime while at the state level; immigrants receive \$25,000 more in benefits than they pay in to state and local governments. So the states are somewhat burdened by the illegal immigrant problem and the federal government is making out like a bandit.

4. Immigrants come here to take welfare.

The vast majority of immigrants come to the US to work and reunite with family members.

A misconception that is often heard is that illegal immigrants come to the US to take advantage of our country's generous aid public programs such as welfare, food stamps, public housing, supplementary security income for the disabled, earned income tax credits, and Medicaid. In fact, undocumented immigrants are not eligible for any of these programs. The only benefit for which an undocumented immigrant might be eligible for in most states are emergency and prenatal health care, immunization and treatments for communicable diseases, certain nutritional programs aimed primarily at children, and regardless of immigration status, children are allowed to attend public schools. No undocumented immigrant can receive any cash benefit from the government. Any immigrant even with legal status (green cards) are not eligible for food stamps or other cash benefits unless they've lawful permanent residents for at least five years. Refugees and asyilise must wait until they are eligible to apply for citizenship to qualify for public benefits.

Immigrant labor force participation is consistently higher than native born. And immigrant workers make up a larger share of the US labor force (12.5%) than they do the US population (11.5%). In one estimate immigrants earn about \$240 billion a year and pay about \$90 billion in taxes.

So the perception is that people come to America to milk America's social safety net. The reality is that the employment rate for adult male illegal immigrants is estimated at about 96% - much higher than for US born males.

5. Immigrants take jobs and opportunities away from Americans.

a. Job Creations and Immigrants

Immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for US and foreign workers while there has been no comprehensive study of immigrant-owned businesses. In Silicon Valley, for instance, companies begun by Chinese and Indian immigrants generated more than \$20 billion in sales and nearly 73,000 jobs a decade ago. Sergey Brin, the founder of Google, came to the US from Russia with his family when they felt they couldn't thrive in a society that regularly discriminated against Jews. Between 1990-2004 over 1/3 of US scientists, who have received Nobel Prizes, have been foreign born. Immigrants started 25% of venture-backed public companies over the last 15 years.

b. Competing Studies

There are competing results from studies done to see the impact of immigrants who are competing for jobs against native unskilled labor workers. Economics would tell us that there should be a negative impact of immigrants on

native unskilled labor workers. On the other hand, many of the jobs that immigrants take are not particularly attractive to unskilled American workers such as picking crops, nannying, cleaning motel rooms, etc.

c. Unattractive Jobs and Job Segregation

Further, immigrants tend to segregate themselves into certain kinds of jobs because they have different skill sets than native-born workers. So, for example, 54% of tailors in America are foreign-born, as are 44% of stucco-plaster masons. But immigrants make up less than 1% of crane operators and less than 1% of sewer pipe cleaners. Chinese cooks are obviously going to cook differently than American cooks. The differences are often complementary not conflicting. The short answer regarding taking jobs and opportunities away is that we simply don't know.

We do know that at the top end, 17% of science and engineering workers with Bachelor degrees were foreign born; 29% with Masters degrees were foreign-born; 38% with doctoral degrees were foreign-born; and, major businesses like Yahoo, Google, and Sun Micro Systems were all founded by immigrants.

6. Immigrants don't want to learn English or become Americans.

This was regularly said about prior generations of Americans, but within 10 years of arrival, more than 70% of immigrants speak English well. The demand for English classes at the adult level far exceed the supply. By the second

generation, 90% of undocumented immigrants speak English very well, and over a half prefer English to their native tongue.

7. Weak US border enforcement has led to high undocumented immigration.

The US has significantly increased border patrol funding, constructed barriers, and employed new surveillance technology without significantly affecting the rates of undocumented migration. We have over 20,000 agents patrolling the borders, a multi-billion dollar budget, yet it only catches 1 out of 4 undocumented immigrants from crossing. The increase for border patrols since 1986 simply diverts migrants away from traditional entry points to more dangerous areas, a trend that has tripled the death rate at border crossings. The problem is insufficient legal avenues for immigrants to enter the US compared to the number of jobs in need of workers.

8. Immigrants enter the US simply to have children born in the US (so-called anchor babies)

The principle of birthright citizenship was enshrined in the US Constitution in 1868 in the 14th Amendment which reads: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state where they reside.” This principle granted full equality and rights to those born in the United States and was aimed at the time to insure full citizenship for recently freed black slaves.

Arizona is proposing to deny birthright citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants. This would overturn 142 years of settled American law.

a. Birthright citizenship does not provide any direct benefit to US born citizens' parents.

Having a US citizen child does not entitle the parent to gain legal status in the US immediately or prevent deportation. It is true that a child can file for their parents, but it is highly unlikely that parents would have a child only to gain legal status 21 years later.

b. Further, if the parent entered the US illegally in the first place, the fact that they had US born children would do them no good. They would need to leave the US to be eligible for the visa and they would be ineligible for any waiver of a 10-year bar to their re-entry because they were unlawfully in the country in the first place.

Ending birthright citizenship would leave thousands of children without citizenship or nationality, rendering them stateless, since many countries do not provide citizenship to children born abroad. Approximately 3.1 million children in the US have at least one parent here illegally.

9. Immigrants broke the law; they should not be rewarded by allowing them to stay.

Romans 13 clearly tells us to obey the law of the states that we are in. Romans 13:1-2 says:

Ro 13:1-2

1Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

2Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Christians ought to be law-abiding and as a general rule should not support law breaking. But just because we discover law breaking for someone here illegally, doesn't end the discussion.

Opponents of immigration use the argument, "they broke the law," as a way of combating any proposals that provide legal status to undocumented immigrants. They also say that the US should not be "rewarding lawbreakers," and use such phrases as "what part of illegal do you not understand?" their intent is to stop any discussion of why these persons are outside the law, what the consequences or harm come to the US because of this circumstance, and whether the law they broke is just or in the best interest of the US and should be changed. In using these arguments, they also imply that undocumented immigrants, being outside the law, are criminals.

a. Why do immigrants break the law?

The first response is to answer the why and harm questions. Migrants and their families generally enter the US to survive by finding jobs. Once they cross the US-Mexico border, 80% find employment. Their intent is not to harm the US, but simply to work; by doing so, they help our country and the economy. So, because they come here to work and they help our nation by doing so, we must ask whether current immigration law, which causes them to hide in the shadows and offers them no protections, is just in the first place.

Moreover, the availability of visas to enter the country through legal channels to either work or reunite with family members are severely limited and do not come close to meeting labor market demands. While the church supports the rule of law, there are times when laws should be examined through a justice lens and be changed. In many ways, the current immigration system is broken and contributes to the abuse, exploitation, and even deaths of migrants who otherwise contribute their work and talents to our nation. While undocumented immigrants are indeed outside the law, and thus “break” the law, the unjust, outdated, and inadequate law also breaks them. Our nation cannot have it both ways.

b. What should the consequence of law-breaking be?

Moreover, undocumented immigrants are not criminals – they have not broken a criminal law. They have only violated a civil law, as we do when we violate a traffic ordinance. The US Supreme Court has held that “a deportation

proceeding is a purely civil action to determine the eligibility to remain in this country, not to punish an unlawful entry. ...The purpose of deportation is not to punish past transgressions, but to put an end to a continuing violation of immigration laws.”

It is estimated that it would cost over \$200 billion to deport all 12 million undocumented immigrants. Further, the several million children who are born in the US cannot be legally deported. What will we do with these children?? Deportation is simply an untenable solution.

10. My relatives (grandfather, great-grandfather, etc.) came here legally and so should these new immigrants.

In the history of the US, immigration law was developed relatively late, in the middle and late stages of the 20th century. For the first 153 years of our nation, there was no general law barring entry into the US, unless it was targeted to certain convicts or prostitutes. The Alien and Sedition Acts, passed early in our history, were seldom enforced. Entering the US did not become a violation until Congress passed a law on March 4, 1929. Because of the lack of funding, Congress did not authorize or appropriate funds to enforce the law until the late 1940's.

The beginning of our current immigration code, the Immigration and Nationality Act, was enacted in 1965. The INA began imposing limits on categories of

immigration and establishing an immigration enforcement regime which we adhere to, in part, today.

Today, our immigration system is ill-equipped to handle the current demand for immigrant labor in our country. According to the 2005 Economic Report of the President, “one of the most pervasive features of undocumented immigration is that it is overwhelmingly driven by supply and demand: immigrants want to work in the US and American employers want to hire them.” However, current legal limits on both temporary and permanent immigration remain largely unresponsive to changes in labor demand as a result of arbitrary numerical limits. Only 66,000 visas per year are available to low-skilled, nonagricultural workers to enter the country legally and work. The H-2A program for agricultural workers brings in about 30,000 workers a year, yet hundreds of thousands of jobs per year in these sectors are filled with immigrant labor, including undocumented immigrants.

11. Providing legal status to undocumented immigrants will penalize immigrants who play by the rules and wait in line.

The current proposal endorsed by the US Catholic bishops, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act, requires that undocumented workers work six years before applying for permanent resident status. This places them “at the back of the line,” behind immigrants who have petitioned for a green card through an employment-based or family-based petition. In addition the proposal reduces backlogs in family categories so that waiting times are reduced to six months or less in all categories by 2011.

Furthermore, many of the undocumented who are here and immigrants waiting in line are the same people. Because of the long backlogs for family visas and other employment-related visas, many decide not to wait and enter through unauthorized means. By fixing the system, through expanding the number of visas available to work and reunite with families, the incentive to migrate without proper visas will be mitigated.

Immigrant Stories From Vineyard Columbus

Stefan (Haiti)

Stefan and his wife moved to Florida in 1993 from Haiti. They struggled to keep up with immigration laws and fees. Meanwhile his wife became pregnant; however, her VISA had expired. They paid \$3000 to an unethical lawyer to help re-instate her VISA but the lawyer never filed paper work. They eventually moved to Ohio and paid an additional \$2400 to reinstate the VISA, but after years of waiting she eventually was deported in 2007. Stefan remains in the U.S. while on a student VISA. Because his children are U.S. citizens they receive minimal federal assistance. The separation of their family has caused grave pain, culminating in the recent earthquake in Haiti. He lost contact with his wife for 15 days. She was eventually found with a broken arm and leg—their family home destroyed.

Benjamin (Canada)

Benjamin and his family legally came to the U.S. in April of 2000 on a work VISA. They began the application for permanent residence in 2002. He has been told the process may take another 8-10 years for a nearly 20-year total. This has caused a cycle of instability, with Benjamin forced to stay with the same job and avoid promotions to comply with immigration law. Additionally, his children, legally, are unable to work until they are 20 years old. He has hired numerous lawyers, some who have taken advantage of him, and is desperately trying to bring about resolution. He has learned if he misses a single piece of mail from immigration and fails to follow up—his entire application can be cancelled and he could lose a decade of trying to become a U.S. citizen. These nuances have caused considerable stress and adverse psychological effects on his family as they wait.

Jeanine (Kenya)

Jeanine is a single, 35 year old Kenyan woman who has been in the USA for 15 years. Her family and community sacrificed for her to attend college in the U.S.A. in hopes for a better life. She has obtained her Bachelors (Tourism and Rec. Management) and Masters degree from a Bible College, and was active in Campus ministries. She desires to work as a Christian missionary, but cannot obtain sponsorship because she is not a U.S. citizen. She also cannot return home due to tribal clashes and political corruption in her native land. Her visa has expired, and she currently works a minimum wage job (\$8/hr). She cannot afford to pay a lawyer, who would cost in excess of \$5000, to help her to get a visa and/or U.S. citizenship. She feels trapped

Theodore (Ghana/Canada)

Theodore is originally from Ghana and a Canadian Citizen. He moved to the U.S. at the invitation of a trucking company, who promised to work with him to obtain U.S. citizenship, along with the opportunity to earn a more competitive wage. He moved to Ohio, and was able to transfer his driver's license. However the "help" from the company never materialized. Neither did the job because, as he has no green card. He has now lived in the U.S.A. for 10 years, unable to return to Canada to renew his license because he cannot cross the border legally. Theodore is also trapped.

Deborah (Nigeria)

Deborah is originally from Nigeria. Her homeland is filled with war and strife. Her family sponsored her education in France in hopes of her having a better life. There she obtained her masters degree in Electrical engineering from a College in France. She came to the U.S. in hopes of obtaining a Ph.D., but thus far has been denied acceptance into a University. While continuing to apply to schools she serves faithfully at her church. She can't drive, nor even borrow a library card because she is an immigrant.

Nadine

Nadine and her husband graduated from college in Texas. Unable to find jobs there they came to Columbus, where both were able to secure minimum wage jobs. They hired a lawyer, who charged them in excess of \$5000 to get a green card and eventually U.S. citizenship. All they received were work permits, which they paid annually for additional fees. They had no green card and no money. Consequently, when Nadine's mother passed away in her native land, she was unable to attend the funeral. For her family to stay legal, Nadine has returned to school and pays out of state tuition, while working full time jobs. She and her family have played by "the rules of the land" in hopes of fulfilling their dreams but instead are living a nightmare.

Wanda (Africa)

Her father gave up his retirement in her native land to sponsor her to the U.S. She obtained her Bachelors, and became involved with a church that helped to fund her graduate degree. She engaged in ministry to hurting women, traveling between the U.S.A. and her native land. Upon graduation, she obtained a working permit in hopes of connecting with a mission organization in the U.S. Not one would hire her because she was an immigrant. Neither could she afford a lawyer nor the exorbitant fees (\$5000+). She obtained a minimum wage job and attempted to enroll back in school. One school conditionally accepted her without a green card, but admonished that they would not protect her if she was caught by U.S. immigration. She decided it was not worth the risk and continues to work at her minimum wage job and lives within the shadows.

Cynthia (Africa)

Lived in the U.S. with her father. When she married, her father moved from the U.S.A. to England for a better opportunity to support the rest of the family. Within the year he was diagnosed with lung cancer. Cynthia's pregnancy as well as her expired visa and work permit precluded her from traveling to see her father. The risk involved her not being able to enter the U.S.A and perhaps being separated from her husband and family forever. Cynthia's dad died. He never saw his grandchildren and Cynthia grieves because was unable to leave the country to help bury her father. She grieves with her mom, who is widowed and home alone in her native land. Here at Vineyard Cynthia has found friends loving her and supporting her through this ordeal.

Vineyard Assistance To Immigrants

Vineyard Columbus has church members from 92 countries.

- **Community Center**

1. ESL Classes (daytime and evening classes) 150 + students
2. Citizenship classes
3. GED Classes *
4. Computer training
5. Daily After School Planning for children of internationals (**)
6. Free medical clinics at 2 Columbus locations available for immigrant community. ***
7. Free dental and vision clinic available to immigrant community. ***
8. Free Legal Clinic ****
9. Extensive Programming for children of immigrants—sports, academic training

- **Urban Ministry**

1. Free Food Pantry for Immigrant community

- **Small Group Ministry**

1. Refugee resettlement co-sponsorship with Church World series partner CRIS (Community Refugee and Immigration Services).

- **General (Bill Christensen)**

1. Welcome services and home stay hospitality for hundreds of international students arriving in Central Ohio for undergraduate and graduate studies at OSU and other local schools.
2. Service ministry to welcome and help Somali refugees settle and succeed in Ohio
3. In home school tutoring of children of Somali Refugees
4. Spanish language interpretation at weekend services

Following stats updated Fall of 2009

Category	Number of students/clients served in 2009-10
*GED	25
**	15 families (0 – 5 years) and 35 after school
***Medical/Dental/Vision	260 patients/yr
**** Legal Clinic	5 Clients Nightly