



February 5, 2025
St. Agatha

A Catholic Response to the Migration Issue in the United States of America

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching Concerning Migrants¹

- People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.
- A country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration.
- A country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

Important Disambiguation of Terms

- **Migrant:** a person who is travelling outside of their proper country of citizenship and/or cultural heritage to another country with the intention of establishing domicile in that new country.
- **Refugee:** a person who has fled or been banished/exiled from their country of native origin due to persecution.
- **Asylum Seeker:** a person who leaves their country of citizenship to seek international protection. Unlike a Refugee, a person may be seeking asylum due to positive or negative motives.
- **Deportatio v. Deportation:** The Latin *deportatio* means exile or banishment, that is the forceful removal of a native people from their homeland. The concept of *deportatio* is condemned in *Gaudium et spes* 27. Whereas, what the Trump administration is doing is not *deportatio*, in the ecclesiastical sense of that word, but “repatriation”, that is the returning of a foreign people to their homeland. Thus, we must disambiguate the Latin *deportatio* from the common usages of the word “deportation” which is more properly repatriation. So, when the Church says it is against deportation, that is true but the Church’s canonical condemnation of *deportatio* does not apply to repatriation. Thus, repatriation is not immoral so long as the three principles numerated above are properly applied.

Further Considerations

Considering the general human dignity, value, and preciousness that applies to all human beings, whether a migrant or not, the Catholic Church must advocate for basic human rights and

¹The following three principles are numerated by the USCCB: <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/catholic-teaching-on-immigration-and-the-movement-of-peoples> (Accessed: Feb. 5, 2025).

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protections for both migrants and the citizens of the country of destiny. These rights are the Rights to Health, Safety, and Stability.

- **Right to Health:** the citizens of the country of destination have the right to be protected from the introduction of diseases from migrants. Likewise, the migrants have a fundamental right to health. Thus, the receiving country must provide basic health screenings and healthcare before admitting a migrant into their country.
- **Right to Safety:** the citizens of the country of destination have the right to be protected from migrants who pose a threat to safety, especially those who would intend violence or societal disorder. Furthermore, migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers, rely on the worst elements of the societies of other countries following them into their country of refuge or asylum threatening their ability to find refuge or asylum in their new country.

The right to safety includes the need to provide a safe place to be received and processed for citizenship in one's new country.

Lastly, the right to safety includes the societal welcome of the receiving nation. Besides ethnic and racial tensions that may or may not exist concerning the culture or race of a migrant community, if the people of the receiving country cannot be assured that the people entering are healthy and safe, there will be an even greater challenge to their societal integration.

- **Right to Stability:** The citizens of the country of destination have the right to societal, economic, and cultural stability. The resources (material, economic, land, educational, healthcare, and environmental) cannot be jeopardized for the people of the native population of a receiving country. If this right is not protected, then there will be animosity from the people of the receiving nation. Likewise, the migrant(s) upon admittance have a right to access the resources of that country to establish stability for one's self or family: material goods, economic opportunity, land, education, healthcare, and environment.

The current problems with migration into the United States of America: there is no place upon entry that can provide for the protection of the abovementioned rights of health, safety, and stability while upholding the three principles of Catholic social teaching concerning migration.

Considering the abovementioned principles and rights, I offer two proposals. The first proposal is a public-private partnership for the creation of Immigration Centers located along international borders, at international airports, and in major US cities. The second proposal concerns merely the Catholic Church and how it can provide a more effective response to the migration crisis in the United States of America.



Proposal I: Immigration Centers

The immigration centers would consist of three units: a Processing Center which is where all legal and governmental affairs occur; a Clinic/Quarantine where those who arrive with injuries or illnesses can receive healthcare; and a Temporary Housing Unit which provides migrants with a place to stay within the Immigration Center until they are either given admittance with US resident status or are denied entry for just cause and sent back across the border.

- **Processing Center:** Would house offices for Immigration and Naturalization Services, Homeland Security, Customs and Border Control, and Immigration Counselors. Upon entry, each person, family, etc. would be documented. They would then go for a basic health screening. A clean health screening would then lead to the migrant(s) continuing the immigration process assisted by an Immigration Counselor who accompanies them through the process of a background check, and all of the legal paperwork needed for admittance into the country.
- **Clinic/Quarantine:** Those who are diagnosed with injury or illness will remain at the clinic or in quarantine until health is restored. However, during this time, it is still possible for the Processing Center unit to be working on their immigration paperwork.
- **Temporary Housing Unit:** Would provide the migrant(s) a temporary place of residence while the Processing Center provides all of the legal migration work.

Ideally, each person, family, etc. would be processed in a manner of a day or two at which time they are then released into the country with resident alien status. Each migrant is given four to six (4 to 6) weeks to establish residency. At which time, they must report to the county sheriff's office their residency which will then be communicated to the federal government. To aid this process, each migrant case would be assigned an Immigration Counselor.

- **Immigration Counselor:** provides legal assistance to the migrant while in the Immigration Center. Furthermore, they can provide possible job opportunity information to migrants with the goal of helping the migrant settle in a place with a job lined-up, thus avoiding any further negative drain on our country's resources.

The Immigration Center would be a singular centralized location providing for all of the rights of health, safety, and stability. Furthermore, the threefold principles of Catholic social teaching concerning migration would also be upheld.

Concerning Current Undocumented Residents of the USA: The Immigration Center could also provide for current undocumented persons inside the United States of America. It could be presented to the current presidential administration that these centers serve a one-time reprieve to those already in the United States illegally. Provide a one year "grace period" where

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all undocumented residents of the United States of America must go to one of the Immigration Centers to be processed. However, anyone who fails to fulfill this process after the grace period is subject to immediate deportation.

Public-Private Partnership: To alleviate the tax burden, the Catholic Church, the Order of Malta/Maltesers International, other religious or charitable corporations, and hospitals, could provide the running of the clinic/quarantine. Hotel corporations could bid for the contract to provide the temporary housing unit of the Immigration Center. Organizations such as the Order of Malta, etc. could also provide the services of Immigration Counselors.

Proposal II: Catholic Immigration Centers

Similar to the abovementioned, but without the Processing Center. A Catholic Immigration Center would provide a clinic/quarantine, immigration lawyers, social workers to help with the establishing of a residence and job placement, and a temporary housing unit. These could be a mission assisted by the Knights of Columbus, Order of Malta/Maltesers International, religious institutes/societies of apostolic life, etc. The running of these centers should be a nationwide effort, as it provides a nationwide benefit.

These centers could provide an opportunity for ecumenical and inter-faith cooperation, as well as partnerships with other non-for profit charitable organizations, hospitals and healthcare providers (for and not-for profit). This would then also lighten the financial responsibility of the Catholic Church as well as any incurred legal liability.

Considering legal liability, I caution a parish, or diocese taking-on this ministry alone. Such an effort should be coordinated at the level of the national episcopal conference, transcending local and State politics. Furthermore, no singular diocese should have to carry the task of care for migrants and the financial and legal liabilities that such a center could present alone.

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