

**The issues, the
ballot and you**

Election 2006

A Catholic Perspective



Source Guide

- Michigan Catholic Conference
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Vatican II Documents

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Conscience Formation In front of the Ballot

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*“Politics ... should be about **fundamental moral choices**” -
U.S. Bishops, *Introduction to Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility**

Each one of us will be called to make a choice as we vote in the next election: so many issues, so much complexity, no perfect formula, and not a great amount of trust in a political process which seems to belong to “politicians”. What are we to do? The Bishops in their statement remind us that Catholics cannot be **single issue voters**.

A group of concerned Catholics have prepared this booklet after having identified some key issues which will shape our policies for the next few years. Each of these issues has been looked at in light of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and do not intend to represent any specific endorsement of a candidate or policy. The choice still remains a very individual process which requires formation of our own conscience and discernment in light of the Gospel values.

Getting the Right Information

Church Teaching

We need to inform ourselves about the Church’s position on all important issues – not just the issues for which we have passion. The U.S. Conference of Bishops publishes every four years a document called **Faithful Citizenship** listing the major issues and reminding us of the teachings of the Gospel and of the Church regarding these issues.

The Iraq War

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The Church on the War in Iraq

Pope John Paul II stated before the 2003 war that it would be a defeat for humanity: *“War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity... War is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations... War cannot be decided upon... except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations.”*

In an interview with Zenit on May 2, 2003, the then Cardinal Ratzinger restated the position of the Holy Father: *“There were not sufficient reasons to unleash a war against Iraq. To say nothing of the fact that, given the new weapons that make possible destructions that go beyond the combatant groups, today we should be asking ourselves if it is still licit to admit the very existence of a ‘just war.’”*

According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the invasion of Iraq did not *“meet the strict conditions of Catholic teaching for the use of military force.”*

Enlightened Action:

During the upcoming campaign we suggest that voters press candidates for their positions on the following issues with respect to the Iraq War:

- (1) a meaningful process for withdrawing American troops from Iraq;
- (2) a responsible rebuilding of the country;
- (3) no permanent presence of American troops there;
- (4) the rejection of the doctrine of preemptive war.

Statement of the Issue

The United States has been engaged in the war in Iraq for three and a half years. There have been 2,888 fatalities and approximately 18,000 wounded in Coalition forces (as of 9/4/06). The estimated number of Iraqi civilian deaths is between 37,800 and 42,189. The financial cost of the war for the U.S. (as of 5/22/06) was \$283 billion, \$5 billion per month, which represents a serious drain on the U.S. Treasury and a serious increase in the indebtedness of the United States. At this writing (9/19/06) casualties seem to be seriously increasing and many of these casualties are the result of attacks between various factions of Iraqis.

How did the War Develop?

President Bush declared a preemptory war on Iraq because of the danger represented by alleged weapons of mass destruction stockpiled by Iraq. There was also an implied link between the Hussein regime and the 9/11 event. Recently the Administration has admitted that these reasons were unfounded. The current rationale for the war is to extend democracy to that country. The current question is how we can leave the country in its current condition?

Know the Facts

Facts are not opinions; facts are actual data which are sometimes difficult to find. Trust data presented by research groups (i.e. Census Bureau) or reports presented by reputable companies (i.e. Kaiser reports regarding Health Care). Read different opinions, watch or listen to different T.V. and radio stations, and do your own research. Know the positions of candidates on key issues. Do your homework.

Use Common Sense (Virtue of Prudence)

- Apply moral principles of justice and dignity to particular situations (policies).
- Beware of easy solutions to complex problems.
- Listen to your faith community and integrate it into your decision-making process.

Use the Principle of “Common Good”

Choose positions and solutions which promote the life, health and dignity of **all** people. If it's good **for you**, but not for the **community at large**, it's probably not the right choice!

Integrate Your Political Decision (voting) in the Context of Prayer

- To be a disciple of Jesus is hard. His platform was clear:

***Care for the poor (today's unemployed), the widow, the orphan, the stranger (our immigrants).
Be Peacemakers! Love your enemy!***

Proposal 2 Michigan Civil Rights Initiative

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Background and official ballot language

In November 2006, Michigan voters will be asked whether to adopt or reject a **constitutional amendment** banning affirmative action in many different facets of civic life. The Michigan Civil Rights Initiative (MCRI) is modeled after Proposition 209 adopted by California voters in 1996. We, in Michigan, can expect the impact of this initiative to be quite broad, affecting not only affirmative action programs but also outreach efforts designed to ensure access to opportunity.

The wording of the ballot will be as follows:

“A proposal to amend the State Constitution to ban affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment to groups or individuals based on their race, gender, color, ethnicity or national origin for public employment, education or contracting purposes”

Potential impact of the passage of Proposal 2

- Diminish access by minority-and women-owned business to government contracts
- Decrease diversity in colleges, especially in the more selective institutions causing businesses to look outside of Michigan for employees
- Eliminate college outreach programs based on race or gender such as pre-college preparation programs for girls or minorities in science and math
- Eliminate scholarships, fellowships and grants at all levels of education that take race, gender or national origin into account
- Eliminate special efforts to ensure representation of women and minorities on boards and commissions

Taxes and Catholic Social Teaching

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Catholic Social Teaching reflection

In a very important document, *Economic Justice For All*, the U.S. Bishops in 1986 establish some guidelines for Catholics in the conduct of social and economic behaviors.

Role of government: “The teachings of the Church insist that **government has a moral function: protecting human rights and securing basic justice** for all members of the commonwealth” (122).

Role of taxes: “The tax system should be continually evaluated in terms of its impact on the poor. This evaluation should be guided by three principles. First, the tax system should raise adequate revenues to pay for the **public needs of society, especially to meet the needs of the poor**. Secondly, the tax system should be structured according to the principle of progressivity, so that those with relatively greater financial resources pay a higher rate of taxation... Thirdly, families below the poverty line should not be required to pay income taxes” (202).

Actions for Consideration

Find out the position of candidates on the issue of taxes both at the Federal and State level. This will require understanding of how taxes are applied to individuals and businesses and how taxes are spent (education, health care, Medicaid, aid for the poor, etc.) The priorities of the budget, both at the Federal and State level represent the moral priorities of us as a society.

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Because Michigan's constitution requires a balanced budget, any deficit must be met with an equivalent reduction in services or increase in taxes or fees. Significant cuts were made in higher education (\$297 million or 14% in just two years) and in revenue sharing with local governments (\$396 million, 26%, over four years) according to the Citizens Research Council of Michigan. The state's workforce has also been cut by 12% or 7,400 workers to its lowest level since 1974.

New Threats

A new "veto-proof" law was passed this summer by the majority in the state legislature. It will eliminate the Single Business Tax (SBT) in January 2008, (scheduled for later elimination) thereby removing an additional \$1.9 billion, approximately 25 percent of Michigan's annual General Fund revenue. The new law's supporters claim that they will identify replacement revenue after the November election, but do not intend to fully replace the funds with business taxes. The only alternative will be to increase taxes on individuals or further cut programs. Contrary to some claims, Michigan is not a high tax state. A 2004 study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston estimates that as of 2000, Michigan's business tax rate ranked it 41st behind the highest among the 50 states. According to Robert Kleine, writing for *The Michigan Prospect* in June, 2005, Michigan's business taxes declined from 20.7 percent of state tax revenues in 1986 to 10.1 percent in 2004.

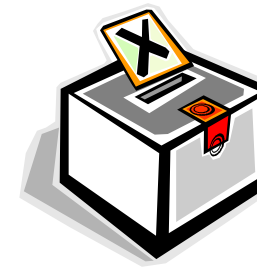
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Catholic Church Position Regarding Proposal 2:

The Michigan Catholic Conference of Bishops (MCC) representing all the bishops of Michigan **strongly urges all Catholics to reject Proposal 2.** In its September 2006 *Focus* issue, the Bishops quote the position of the Conference of U.S. Bishops regarding affirmative actions programs:

"We support judiciously administered affirmative action programs as tools to overcome discrimination and its continuing effects."



Rationale for the Catholic Church position

In a perfect world, affirmative action programs would not be necessary. Unfortunately, the reality is quite different and **we are not all born with the same opportunities.** Because of a long history of discrimination, because of fundamental injustices in our policies, be it health care, housing, education, many people cannot compete in all aspects of our society without specific programs to help level the playing field for fair competition. Proposal 2 is not only bad policy for the State of Michigan, it is a rejection of what is central to our Gospel values: the care of the most vulnerable in our society.

Proposal 5—Mandatory School Funding Initiative

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Content of this proposal

In November 2006, Michigan voters will be asked to adopt or reject a legislative initiative whose purpose is to ensure appropriate funding for all schools K-16 in the State of Michigan. This proposal would ensure:

- Appropriate funding in 2007 for K-12 and all public community colleges and universities with yearly adjustment equal to the annual change in inflation.
- Use of a 3 year average to calculate enrollment (protect district with a declining enrollment)
- A reduction in the gap between basic per pupil allowance and maximum state guaranteed from \$1,300 to \$1,000
- A cap in contributions of employers to the Michigan Public School Retirement Fund to 80% or 14.87 % of payroll. The State of Michigan would be responsible for making up the difference.
- Funding requirements would be achieved through State School Aid Fund, federal resources and the State General Fund in 2007 and years beyond.

Background and analysis

Analysis provided by the Citizens Research Council (non-profit organization which analyzes all budget issues of the State of Michigan (www.crcmichigan.org) estimates that the additional cost of the proposed law to the state budget will be between \$565 million and \$707 million for the 2007 year and will increase every year.

Presently, education represents a large part of the state budget: 1/3 of a total budget of \$40.3 billion. Some of this funding comes from the General Fund estimated at \$8.8 billion in 2005. A quarter of this fund is attributed to education.

Taxes and Catholic Social Teaching

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Budget Cuts: In late 2005 and early 2006 successful efforts were made by the U.S. Congress to cut spending even as members were considering a large tax cut which was eventually passed (see below). The programs to be cut included Medicaid, food stamps, higher education, student loans, child support administrative costs, foster care and pension insurance. (*New York Times*, 1/19/05)

Tax Cuts: According to the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation the series of tax cuts passed since 2001 will cost the federal treasury \$258 billion in fiscal 2006, roughly equal to the projected budget deficit of \$260 billion. Not included are the latest tax cuts--the \$70 billion federal tax cut of May 2006 that gave an average of \$42,000 to millionaire households annually but only \$20 to households in the middle fifth of income earners.

Michigan Budget

Michigan is locked in a structural budget deficit. Our present revenues simply will not pay for essential state services. Michigan incurred \$7.8 billion in budget deficits from 2000 to 2005. The state's fiscal reserves were exhausted and programs were reduced by \$3 billion to cover these deficits. In February 2005, the Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS) projected that an additional five billion in deficits will be incurred in the next decade. Although Michigan's weakened economy caused some revenue losses, incremental multi-year tax reductions beginning in 1999 are a large cause of our deficits--75 percent or \$5.9 billion of the \$7.8 billion deficit total as of 2005 according to MLHS. These cuts were in the Personal Income Tax and in the Single Business Tax.

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The fact that most of us do not like to pay taxes is a well known reality. However, taxes are one of the primary tools used by our government to ensure the protection of the common good and society at large. After a review of the budget situation both at the Federal and State level, this paper will reflect on Catholic Social Teaching on taxes.

Federal Budget

Our federal government faces serious and difficult challenges in both how it raises sufficient funds to operate (taxes) and in how it spends those funds (budget). These are large and complicated questions. This paper simply presents a broad outline of the issues.

Debt: The United States is in serious debt. Our national debt has increased from \$5.8 trillion to \$8.3 trillion since 2001. Interest on the national debt, \$200 billion plus in 2006, will go up due to the fiscal 2006 budget deficit and increasing interest rates. This interest payment is one of the largest items in the federal budget. In 2000, the country was actually paying down the national debt and there were projections, however visionary, that the debt could be eliminated in ten years.

Annual Deficit: The fiscal 2006 budget year, ending 10/31/06, will have an operating deficit of \$260 billion according to projections. “Off budget” expenditures in 2006, including spending on the war in Iraq and spending on Katrina, are additional and will also be added to the debt.

A Catholic Reflection on this Proposal

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As of today, the General Fund budget will be reduced by \$1.9 billion due to the elimination of the Single Business Tax. Replacement for this amount has not been either identified or approved. Hence, **any proposed spending for education (Proposal 5) will require cuts from other programs funded through the General Fund: Medicaid, Public Health, Corrections, Human Services, etc.**

Catholic Social Teaching reflection:

In a world where just taxation is unfortunately not a moral priority, this proposal creates a **conflict between two important Catholic Social Teachings:** on one hand, the right of every person to a good education (elimination of discrimination in education based on economic situation) and on the other hand, the protection of the poor and disadvantaged served today by many programs funded by the General Fund budget.

Beyond educating ourselves around the full impact of this proposal, one should reflect on the role of taxes and its link to the common good. In what ways will the transfer of money from the General Fund be replaced to continue protecting Medicaid and other such programs as well as the role of our representatives in establishing a just budget?

Abortion

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Statement of Issue

The Roe vs. Wade decision of the United States Supreme Court in 1973 made abortion legal in all fifty states. Since then an estimated 47 million abortions have been performed in the U.S.A. Currently, there are slightly over a million abortions performed each year. The question is: How can we eliminate or greatly reduce this scourge of abortion from the American scene?

How We Got There

Numerous attempts have been made to make the Roe vs. Wade decision more restrictive but most of these efforts have been struck down as unconstitutional. Repeated surveys indicate that the majority of Americans would favor a policy that would allow for abortion in several cases:

- (1) danger of death to the mother
- (2) a serious defect in the fetus, and
- (3) where the pregnancy is a result of rape or incest.

The most effective efforts thus far in reducing the number of abortions have been: education and counseling, greater accessibility to health care and more adequate financial and social resources for child care.

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The U.S. Bishops have reminded us that “*Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life, a fundamental human right, and an urgent national priority. We need to reform the nation’s health care system, and this reform must be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured.*”
(*Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*)

Advocates for *Universal Health Care* commonly understand that life turns out differently for the uninsured--about 18,000 Americans die each year of treatable diseases because they don’t have health care coverage--a number comparable to having a 9/11 disaster occur every other month. Should this impact cause us to take the Bishops’ words in *Faithful Citizenship* more seriously: “*What kind of a nation do we want to be?*”

Actions for Consideration

- Should the Catholic values voter find out the candidates’ positions on financing of health care, universal coverage, incremental reforms such as the Michigan First Health Care plan for currently uninsured persons, and support for the Medicaid program including seeking increased revenue to support the program adequately?
- What would the candidates propose to modify in the delivery and financing structures to make health care costs affordable for businesses, government and citizens alike?

The Exclusive Health Care System

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The Problem and Its Impact

The last major proposal to provide comprehensive health care to all Americans was sent to the U.S. Congress by President Clinton in 1994. It failed and since that time the nation's problems have deepened: Aggregate health care spending in 1994 was \$2 trillion, 12 percent of the gross national product. In 2005 it was \$3 trillion, 16 percent. (*New York Times*, 8/22/06)

Americans pay for the most expensive health care system in the world, yet more than 45 million people have no insurance and limited access to primary or non-emergency care. Many of the insured are increasingly threatened about their continued coverage and its affordability.

How the Problem Developed

Over several decades, access to care and coverage has gone down as costs have gone up. Many factors contribute to the high cost of care that makes the system exclusive:

- Growth and longevity of the aged population, a group in declining health by definition;
- Third party payments (public and private insurance coverage) which masks the true cost of care for insured consumers;
- Lack of coordination or case management of the individual's care leading to disconnectedness in the delivery system and questionable treatments and procedures;
- Technological advances introduced into the system in the areas of pharmaceuticals, diagnostic testing, surgical procedures, and end-of-life care, with no consistent, central review of their efficacy;
- The insured consumer's desire for unfettered access to care;
- The care provider's desire for unfettered practice of medicine.

The end result of these factors is that U.S. health care is rationed on the basis of an individual's age and economic status.

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"Human life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception." (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* #46)

An important explanatory note to this statement says: *"This declaration expressly leaves aside the question of the moment when the spiritual soul is infused. There is not a unanimous tradition on this point and authors are yet in disagreement."*

With regard to voting for a pro-choice candidate Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) stated: *"When a Catholic does not share a candidate's stand in favor of abortion and/or euthanasia, but votes for a candidate for other reasons, it is considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons."* (Ratzinger-Memorandum July 6, 2004)

Enlightened Action

In a democratic pluralistic society Church teaching cannot dictate public policy. Our political effort must aim at achieving our ethical goals of eliminating or reducing abortion to the greatest degree and most effective way possible. Experience has proven that a significant number of abortions occur because of lack of informed options or the unavailability of support services for pregnant mothers. Our efforts should move in three directions:

- educational effort to provide better understanding of Church teaching
- supporting efforts that provide expectant mothers with alternative options to abortion
- promote candidates sensitive to the importance of support services for expectant mothers

Stem Cell Research

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Statement of Issue

The most promising area of medical research for remedies or cures to some of our most devastating illnesses (Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, spinal cord injury) lies in the field of stem cell research. Most people heartily endorse research using stem cells from adult tissue and umbilical cord blood but a good number object to embryonic stem cell research on the conviction that it deliberately destroys human life. Scientists, on the other hand, almost universally are convinced that that the greatest hope lies precisely in research with embryonic stem cells because they have the greatest potential for development and least danger of rejection.

(<http://www.medpagetoday.com/PublicHealthPolicy/StemCellResearch/tb/1929>)

How We Got There

On August 9, 2001 President Bush approved government funding for embryonic stem cell research on 60 already existing stem cell lines but refused government funding for developing any new lines. He also appointed a commission to monitor this research. Scientists have complained that this limitation severely restricts their ability to do the research they feel is necessary. A number of other countries and some states have approved such research and sought extensive funding to support it. The question is: Should such embryonic stem cell research be permitted and should federal funding support it?

Catholic Social Teaching

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*“The new realities that are having such a powerful impact on the productive process, such as the globalization of finance, economics, trade and labor, **must never violate the dignity and centrality of the human person**, nor the freedom and democracy of peoples.” (Pope John Paul II, Homily at the Mass for the Jubilee of Workers, May 2, 2000).*

“Renumeration for labor is to be such that man may be furnished the means to cultivate worthily his own material, social, cultural, and spiritual life and that of his dependents, in view of the function and productiveness of each one, the conditions of the factory or workshop, and the common good.” (The Church and the Modern World, Vatican Council II). “The loss of centrality on the part of States must coincide with a greater commitment on the part of the international community to exercise a strong guiding role.” (Compendium #370) “Global economic forces empower some and impoverish many. The gulf between rich and poor nations has widened, and sense of responsibility toward the world's poor and oppressed has grown weaker... The effects of these forces are evident in our economy, the immigrants and refugees among us, the threat of terrorism, dynamics of the drug trade, and pressures on workers.” (“International Challenge for U.S. Parishes”, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997)

Questions for reflection:

- What is the position of candidates running for public office on regulation of world trade particularly with regard to workers and the environment?
- What is their position regarding the role of an international body to oversee the world economy, development aid to impoverished countries and the reduction of debt for “heavily indebted poorer countries”?

Statement of the issue

The fact of globalization is not at issue here. Global trade, networks and companies are growing and will continue to grow as our world grows smaller. But these changes need to happen in a way that minimizes the negative effects, particularly on workers and the environment. Do the wages, benefits and working conditions of the workforce plummet as we “race to the bottom” in global competition? Does globalization as currently practiced hasten the destruction of the environment? Are less developed countries the losers in trade pacts? Is the globalization of the economy too much under the control of corporations that are not accountable enough to the people through our elected representatives? Is the Congress of the U.S.A. doing its job when it abdicates its role of reviewing and revising trade pacts (the fast-track process)? Should there be an accountable body at the international level to regulate the global economy and make sure it is working for the good of all?

How did Globalization Develop?

In 1944, near the end of World War II, the leaders of the allied nations decided that trade among the countries of the world was the best deterrent to war. They created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to provide loan money for economic recovery from the war and to promote economic development in poor nations. In the 1980's these agencies and the countries that dominated them increasingly adopted a neo-liberal, *laissez-faire* approach to the economy: allow the unregulated market and the multinational corporations to be their own guide. Structural adjustment (austerity) programs were imposed on borrowers: cutting social programs, privatizing public agencies and companies, etc. International debt payments became so large that interest payments alone placed impossibly huge burdens on the poorer countries.

Sometimes it is wrongly said that the Catholic Church opposes stem cell research. The fact is: the Catholic Church has long supported research using stem cells from adult tissue and umbilical cord blood which is already providing cures and treatment for suffering patients in a number of areas. What the Church does oppose is embryonic stem cell research when it is conducted in a way that deliberately destroys human life.

“I condemn in the most explicit and formal way, experimental manipulations of the human embryo, since the human being from conception to death, cannot be exploited for any purpose whatsoever.” (John Paul II 1982)

Enlightened Action

Stem cell research is one of the most promising and vexing issues for the contemporary Catholic. There are so many unanswered questions both in the scientific and religious arena.

We need to support:

- ongoing personal education and enrichment in the developments of both the scientific and religious fields.
- encouragement and support for stem cell research that does not compromise our commitment to respect life at every stage
- support for a Presidential Commission with real power to monitor and regulate government funded research.

Immigration

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Statement of Issue:

There are ten to twelve million undocumented immigrants in the United States

The subject of immigration has had a profound impact on our nation. Immigration is not a simple issue, but one that evokes strong passions and economic, legal, social and national security debates. Immigration is not just a policy issue, but ultimately a humanitarian issue that impacts the basic dignity and life of a person.

All sides agree, our nation's immigration policy is flawed and needs to be repaired. The USCCB has called upon Congress and the President to enact comprehensive immigration reform before the end of this year.

Current status of immigration reform:

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) opposed a bill passed by the House that includes only enforcement measures and lauded the Senate bill as a step in the right direction. The Senate bill encompasses many of the elements endorsed by the USCCB.

Our Faith-Filled Response

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USCCB recommendations for humane, fair and comprehensive immigration reform:

- A viable path to citizenship for the undocumented
- A temporary worker program which protects workers' rights
- A family-based system to reduce waiting times for family reunification
- Restoration of due process protections for immigrants

The Catholic Church acknowledges and supports the right of a sovereign nation to secure its borders. However, an immigration policy must not fundamentally change the heritage of our nation as a welcoming, compassionate society.

Catholic Social Teaching reflection

- **John Paul II, message for 2001 World Peace Day:** *"Institutions in host countries must keep careful watch to prevent the spread of the temptation to exploit foreign laborers, denying them the same rights enjoyed by nationals, rights that are guaranteed to all without discrimination."*
- **Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2241:** *"Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life."*