



one family under God

building a welcoming christian community

Have you ever felt alone? Not “none of my friends are texting me back” alone, or “why didn’t I get invited to that party?” alone. Truly alone, with no one to offer you support, or stand by your side, or shoulder some of your burden?

It’s horrible to feel alone. Humans are social beings by nature—in fact, most of creation is. We are intended to be in community. From a religious perspective, we say that people are

loved into being. From the very first moment of existence, they are in communion with God.

God willed each and every person into existence for a specific purpose, and he did not make any mistakes. From the moment a person comes into being, he or she is loved and willed by God, and will exist forever, in this life and the next, no matter how long his or her life on earth lasts.

It is one thing to talk about being loved by God and created in community. It is quite another to live the daily experience of often feeling alone. The goal, then, is to make the theoretical knowledge of God's loving and constant presence real in our lives, so that when we are lonely, we find authentic comfort in our friendship with Jesus.

Look around you. Who in the world do you think feels most alone? People who are dying? Children without families? Undocumented immigrants? Women experiencing unexpected pregnancies? The very poor, searching for the basic necessities of life for their families?

Most of the problems in our culture stem from people feeling alone. When our communities break down, and we become selfish, people get hurt.

We are better together. In Catholic Social Teaching, we talk about the concept of solidarity. Humans are interdependent beings. Solidarity embraces interdependence as a gift, something that allows us to live our common humanity by cherishing each other and working for the good of others as we also work for our own good. In doing this, we use our gifts to make the world a better place for all people, including ourselves.



“Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”

– Saint John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*

One very clear expression of solidarity is the way we treat immigrants and refugees to our country.

There are some who suggest that people without proper documentation should not be allowed to live in the U.S., and should be kept from our country and its opportunities.

The truth is that America is a nation of immigrants. We are one country formed by people of every race and culture in the world. The U.S. saw major waves of immigration during the colonial era, the first part of the 19th century and from the 1880s to 1920. Even then, immigrants came to America seeking greater economic opportunity, while some, such as the Pilgrims in the early 1600s, arrived in search of religious freedom. The country was founded on Christian principles, including welcoming strangers to our land, and offering them the opportunities of employment and security for their families.

Solidarity invites us to see immigrants through the lens of our common dignity as members of the human community. We are challenged to overcome the often volatile rhetoric of political parties and media frenzies to look at what our faith tells us about the situation. When we come to understand what motivates people to leave behind their homelands and their heritage to come to the United States, we learn that they are looking for the same things we are: peace, security, opportunity, education, and stability.

Our immigration system needs to be improved. Desperate and finding no legal alternative, thousands risk their lives in the desert or by sea, trusting smugglers known as “coyotes”, human traffickers or drug cartels to help them cross the border illegally. Every day, parents are deported, and families are ripped apart. Undocumented people are living in the shadows, afraid every time they leave their homes. And people who have been here for years, contributing to our communities, are unable to receive the same benefits that we do.



“For all its limitations, our national immigration policy has always tried to keep parents and children together and to reunite families that are separated by our borders. Not anymore. In the name of enforcing our laws, now we are breaking up families. One in four deportees are being removed from an intact family. We are talking about souls, not statistics. We are talking about families. We’re talking about fathers and husbands who, with no warning, will not be coming home for dinner tonight—and who may not see their families again for a decade at least. We are talking about women suddenly left as single mothers to raise their children in poverty. We are talking about a state policy that results in making many children virtually “orphans,” to be raised on the streets or in foster care. This is what the immigration issue is doing to our national soul. We need to stop ourselves. We can do better. America has always been a nation of justice and law. But we are also a people of compassion and common sense. What we’re doing right now betrays our values and makes our country weaker and more vulnerable. We are a better people than this. We can find a better way.”

– Archbishop Jose Gomez, Immigration and the Next America: Renewing the Soul of our Nation



What is our role here? There is a lot we can do on a personal level, while we pray that our legislators make laws in keeping with the dignity of all people. We look to the example of Jesus, who taught us love,

mercy, and compassion. Exemplifying him means seeing ourselves in others, recognizing our common humanity, and reaching out to accompany them in their suffering.

“Immigration policy should be generous; it should be fair; it should be flexible. With such a policy we can turn to the world, and to our own past, with clean hands and a clear conscience.”

– John F. Kennedy, A Nation of Immigrants

Together, we are working for a just world—a world where every life is valued because every life has infinite dignity as a creation of God.

Immigration law is highly complex. Who is or is not allowed to travel to our country? Who is an asylum seeker, a refugee, a legal vs illegal immigrant? Are naturalized citizens true citizens or are they still at risk for deportations? What is a sanctuary city/state? Are they legal? Are our churches places of sanctuary? What happens

when parents are deported but the children are U.S. citizens? Are detention facilities necessary? As a nation, we have been contemplating these questions for years, but taking action towards a better solution is the challenge.

One of the most contentious issues surrounding immigration is the question of whether to honor promises made to DACA recipients. These young adults were brought to the United States by their parents as young children. They have grown up here in the U.S., speak English, have attended school, and college, have jobs and families. Some are business owners. Many don’t remember ever having lived anywhere but the U.S.



What does our faith tell us is the right thing to do in this situation? It is complicated.

Treating people justly necessitates giving them what is deserved. Is permanent residency a just

solution for children brought to the U.S. illegally through no fault of their own? Is citizenship? Is deportation?

Our faith also compels us to look at situations with mercy. What does mercy necessitate in this situation? And how do we weigh the competing goods of protecting borders and keeping families together when making a decision?

No partisan finger-pointing is needed on this issue as it is clear that leaders on both sides of the aisle have stalled solutions to DACA for

reasons of political expediency. It can be difficult even for Christians to look at these issues without our partisan predispositions. But, that is exactly what the Church demands we do—evaluate each issue as to whether it protects the dignity of each human person and furthers the common good.

In this instance, as with all other social issues, the Christian community is called to prayerfully reflect on the Scripture, on Catholic social teaching, and on the wisdom of our Holy Fathers. We are told to form our consciences and encouraged to add our voices to the debate, offering solutions grounded in our understanding of the human person.

We should be very proud that the Catholic Church continues to take the lead in offering assistance and services to immigrants, as it has done since the foundation of our country. Based on our unshakable belief in the dignity of every person, and the right to pursue personal fulfillment and to create a sustainable, peaceful life for their families, we welcome immigrants into our churches, illustrating the Catholic, universal nature of our faith. Every week, churches in the Archdiocese of New York celebrate Mass in a variety of languages.

“The Church is a mother with an open heart. She knows how to welcome and accept, especially those in need of greater care, those in greater difficulty. The church, as desired by Jesus, is the home of hospitality...welcoming the different cultures, of which our earth is so richly blessed.”
– Pope Francis, 2015

If we understand that we really are better together—that this is not just a snappy catchphrase—because we were created to love and to care for other people, then issues of solidarity take a central role in our decision-making. We begin looking at how all of our choices, big and small, impact others around us for better or for worse. We look at the issues of public policy through the lens of their impact on the common good. Does a particular law

positively or negatively affect those in our communities, in our churches, in our families? How does it affect the most vulnerable: the poor, the sick, the immigrants, the orphans, the preborn?

As Christians, community and solidarity are not extrinsic to our lived experience of the faith. Instead, they are central to discipleship. As Jesus said, “When you did this to the least ones, you did it to me.”

Questions for Discussion:

- What is at the root of most social problems?
- What is it about the way humans are made that makes us better together?
- How would you describe solidarity? Can you give an example of a time that you practiced solidarity with someone in need?
- What are the flaws of the United States immigration system? How can we improve it?
- What are some of the most important issues of the immigration debate?
- Choose one issue, one point of debate, and apply both justice and mercy principles. Which is most compelling? Do the rights of the state outweigh the needs of the individual/family? Or vice versa?
- Good people can disagree on how to fix immigration in the U.S.. But, what is our moral obligation toward all people, whether we know them or they are strangers?

