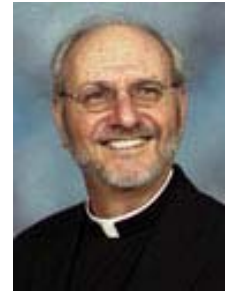


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Neighbors and Partners

Last Labor Day agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) swooped down on a poultry plant in Stillmore, Ga., arresting 120 people with false papers and scattering another 300 in all directions. ICE agents also raided several homes in town, breaking windows and entering forcibly. As people scattered, one family hid for two nights in a tree, while other frightened workers fled into the woods, leaving women and children behind without resources.

The get-tough tactics of ICE, part of the Department of Homeland Security, have repeatedly disrupted communities through mass roundups and midnight raids from Charlotte, N.C., to Arkadelphia, AR., to Greeley, CO. The raid in Stillmore shrunk the town's population in a single day by at least one-third, while devastating its local economy.

Out of fear for homeland security, the immigrant population is under siege. Those arrested experience their families terrorized, their rights abused and their detention location frequently kept secret.

The U.S. Catholic bishops, together with people of faith, recognize the human and social costs of an enforcement-only policy that divides families, disrupts communities and disrespects human dignity. The bishops are asking sensibly moral people to join in calling for comprehensive immigration reform. Those workers who pick our vegetables, process our food and fill a myriad of service jobs in our communities have become an indispensable part of the U.S. economy, and no immigration policy will work without acknowledging that fact.

A proposed comprehensive immigration reform would include "earned" legalization for undocumented persons in the United States. Earning legalization with a path to citizenship would stabilize the workforce in many areas, promote family unity and ultimately enhance national security. Legalization could come with certain stipulations, such as requiring six years of employment, the payment of a fine and any owed back taxes, plus English instruction

before workers and their families could become eligible for permanent residency. With permanent residency gained, the individual could, after five more years, apply for citizenship—another lengthy process.

Opponents of earned legalization wrongly argue that it looks like amnesty. Their mantra: illegals broke the law in coming, so why reward them with citizenship? First, deporting 12 million undocumented people appears unrealistic and complicated, and secondly, the entire U.S. economy would slump from dislocations in various labor markets. Amnesty means legitimate authority restoring a guilty party to innocence by wiping away the offense. Earned legalization, on the other hand, represents a process that may demand an undocumented person spend 11 to 13 years to complete the requirements for citizenship.

Some of the root causes of illegal immigration trace themselves back to the free trade agreements, NAFTA and CAFTA, that favored the free flow of goods and capital, but not labor. The agreements were written to benefit the corporations, forcing disadvantaged workers to migrate to support their families, even by entering the U.S. illegally. In addition, the availability of visas to enter the country legally are severely limited and do not meet our labor market demands. Comprehensive immigration reform could address agriculture and industry's need for labor while guaranteeing justice for workers by including living-wage levels, workplace safety requirements and protections for family unity.

According to the Church's social teachings, nations have a right to control their borders, but not an absolute right. All people have a right to migrate to earn their livelihoods, if their home countries cannot provide work. For the common good, the U.S. needs reasonable immigration laws to sustain a strong economy and accommodate foreign workers—and, thereby, avoid midnight raids from Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

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The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.