



# PROVIDING PASTORAL CARE TO IMMIGRANTS

USCCB Fact Sheet

2015

## RELIGIOUS LIBERTY UNDER ATTACK

### A Concrete Example

National and local Catholic charitable agencies around the country have long provided services to people in need, regardless of immigration status. However, several states passed laws that forbid **what state legislatures consider “harboring”** of undocumented immigrants—and **what the Church considers Christian charity and pastoral care** to those immigrants.

In Alabama, for example, the Catholic bishops, in cooperation with the Episcopal and Methodist bishops of Alabama, filed suit against a law prohibiting “harboring” of undocumented immigrants. Together, they explained that the “law makes illegal the exercise of our Christian religion which we, as citizens of Alabama, have a right to follow.” They expressed concern that legally prohibited “harboring” (when there is knowledge or reckless disregard of the fact that persons are undocumented immigrants) would substantially burden their churches in their mission to serve undocumented immigrants in Alabama.

The law would have a chilling effect on their ministries—among other things, these church leaders feared that the prohibition on “harboring” would extend to activities like “encourag[ing immigrants] to attend Mass or giv[ing] them a ride to Mass;” “counsel[ing] them in times of difficulty or in preparation for marriage;” and inviting “them to come to Alcoholic Anonymous meetings or other recovery groups at our churches.”

Other states have adopted similar laws that threaten the Church’s ministry to undocumented immigrants. In March 2012, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and several other Christian denominations filed an *amicus* brief with the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Arizona v. United States*. The brief discussed how the Arizona law and many state immigration laws like it threaten the Catholic mission to provide food, shelter, and other care to all. In June 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision and found that several of the provisions of the Arizona law were pre-empted by federal immigration law, so these provisions were struck down.

Aside from **Alabama** and **Arizona**, **Georgia**, **Oklahoma**, **South Carolina**, and **Utah** have enacted laws that generally make criminal the “harboring” of undocumented immigrants.

### Is our most cherished freedom truly under threat?

Among many current challenges, these state immigration laws affect the religious liberty of the Church because they have criminalized certain acts of Christian charity and pastoral care. Religious liberty is more than freedom of worship; it includes our ability to make our contribution to the common good of all Americans without having to compromise our faith. Without religious liberty properly understood, all of us suffer, including those who seek a better life here in the United States.

*What can you do to ensure the protection of religious freedom at home and abroad?*

The U.S. Bishops have called for a Fortnight for Freedom from June 21 to July 4, 2015. Please visit [www.fortnight4freedom.org](http://www.fortnight4freedom.org) for more information on this important time of prayer, education, and action in support of religious freedom!