

Immigration, Justice and our call as Catholics

As I write this, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security is arranging to detain immigrants who lack proper papers at two Indiana sites. One of these is in our diocese adjacent to Grissom Air Reserve Base. The Miami Correctional Facility, a prison, has about 1,200 unused beds. The government is seeking such placements in order to increase the number of people who can be detained and contained. And in order to increase the size of the workforce to contain them.

I understand much about the legal and security issues that people wrestle with. It is more difficult to summarize a hundred years of economic and migratory complexities. Earlier this summer at the Mass at Chicago's Rate Field that celebrated Pope Leo XIV, Cardinal Cupich echoed the Pope's concern that society must not define migrants and other groups "by what they lack."

"Humanity is diminished whenever the unborn or undocumented, the unemployed or the unhealthy, are excluded, uninvited or unwelcome," the Cardinal said.

Catholic moral teaching grew out of our reflection on the Sacraments. It reveals that great struggles are not only about choosing good over evil. Rather, there is a struggle in choosing one good over another. The duty to secure borders is truly apparent. The duty to help refugees, the hungry and the homeless involves not only charity but justice. The standards of laws and judicial process, of charity and mercy, seem to be weighted against each other. It is hard work to make them work together. The hard work of fixing our broken

immigration system continues to be avoided by both political parties.

My role as a priest and bishop certainly includes my loyal citizenship, one that is alloyed with my discipleship. This does not dispense me from moral and ethical opportunities and obligations. Individually and collectively, the U.S. bishops have for decades actively advocated for equitable, law-based treatment of refugees and migrants. At the same time, the people of our Church (with other communions to be sure) aid families who are at the depths of dislocation, hunger and homelessness. Government action has shut down most of our institutions that were helping with legal immigration and refugee status.

Many religious leaders encourage attitudes of mercy toward good people whose immigration status is their only demerit. Everyone is created in the image of God, and that should shape our approach to all others. But individuals do not possess or contain the image, they exist “in” it with the rest of us. There is good theological scholarship that reminds us that whoever ignores that image in others will be diminishing their own participation in that image. The expectations are even greater for baptized Catholics who are called to be images of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

We have to work every day at being both a good image and a good citizen. Be wary of anyone who acts like this is an “either/or” proposition.

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