



FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP 2014

This series has been prepared by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference as a guide for those who wish to inform their consciences in order to participate more fully in the political process. To learn more about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (FCFC), visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org and www.wisconsinatholic.org.

Fourth in a seven-part series

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Why is religious liberty vital?

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, the right to religious freedom and freedom of conscience is “based on the very nature of the human person, whose dignity enables him freely to assent to the divine truth...” (n. 2106) This freedom must never be coerced, for to do so is to injure human beings in their relationship with God.

As Pope Francis has written, “A healthy pluralism, one which genuinely respects differences and values them as such, does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual’s conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques. This would represent, in effect, a new form of discrimination and authoritarianism. The respect due to the agnostic or non-believing minority should not be arbitrarily imposed in a way that silences the convictions of the believing majority or ignores the wealth of religious traditions. In the long run, this would feed resentment rather than tolerance and peace.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 255).



**FROM ENDING THE SLAVE TRADE, TO
SECURING CIVIL RIGHTS, FROM
ERECTING HOSPITALS AND SCHOOLS,
TO HELPING THE UNBORN, THE
HOMELESS, AND THE HUNGRY —
PEOPLE OF FAITH HAVE LED THE WAY.**

What about the rights of nonbelievers?

As Pope Francis has written, “As believers, we also feel close to those who do not consider themselves part of any religious tradition, yet sincerely seek the truth, goodness and beauty which we believe have their highest expression and source in God. We consider them as precious allies in the commitment to defending human dignity, in building peaceful coexistence between peoples and in protecting creation.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 257).

What are some of the main threats to religious liberty in the U.S.?

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services mandate to force almost all employers, including those who object on religious grounds, to provide free coverage for contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs in their insurance plans.
- State immigration laws prohibiting individuals and churches from giving any assistance to undocumented immigrants.
- State laws forcing Catholic foster care and adoption agencies to disband because they refuse to place children in the homes of same-sex couples or cohabitating opposite-sex couples.
- Recent calls to change the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) of 1993, which prohibits laws that substantially burden a person's free exercise of religion.
- A federal requirement to force humanitarian agencies that assist victims of human trafficking to provide or refer for contraceptive and abortion services.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Why is the Church committed to immigration reform?

As the Wisconsin bishops wrote in their 2012 pastoral letter, *Traveling Together in Hope*:

“As Catholics, we uphold the sanctity and dignity of every human life, from conception to natural death. We affirm that every human being is created in God’s image through His boundless love. Just as we work to protect the innocent unborn, 40 million of whom have already lost their lives, so we cannot turn our backs on the 12 million immigrants in our midst who long to live freely and fully.”

But isn’t the real issue the fact that many immigrants enter and reside illegally?

Wisconsin’s bishops acknowledge that the rule of law is essential to maintaining a stable society. However, they explain that Americans “have to acknowledge that some of our foreign and domestic policies and practices have contributed to the illegal entry of immigrants. Our nation’s incessant demand for inexpensive goods and services is one of the driving forces behind the export of American jobs and the hiring of immigrant workers. Our nation is a magnet for immigrants because there is work here and because of the international disparity in wages. Our aging population needs younger workers.” (*Traveling Together in Hope*)

The most important reason, however, is that there is a mismatch between the legal supply and economic demand for immigrant labor. Simply put, the U.S. does not issue sufficient work visas to meet our nation’s demand for labor.

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What does comprehensive reform look like?

Comprehensive immigration reform should include “a temporary work program with worker protections and a path to permanent residency; family reunification policies; a broad and fair legalization program; access to legal protections, including due process and essential public programs; refuge for those fleeing persecution and exploitation; and policies to address the root causes of migration. The right and responsibility of nations to control their borders and to maintain the rule of law should be recognized.” (FCFC, 83)

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES DO NOT ONLY REPRESENT A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED, BUT ARE BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO BE WELCOMED, RESPECTED AND LOVED.

(Pope Francis, *Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2014)