



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
"We are one family under God"

Transitioning to a New Administration: How the Catholic Church can Assist Immigrants and Refugees

Generally, what should I communicate in my parish and religious community?

- *The Bishops and the Catholic Church support immigrants and refugees:* The U.S. Bishops are committed to ensuring that refugees and immigrants are humanely welcomed to the United States without sacrificing our nation's security.
- *Our Catholic community provides welcome, understanding, and spiritual guidance:* The Catholic community stands with immigrants and refugees. We welcome them and offer them spiritual support and comfort.

What guidance can we provide to undocumented immigrants?

Listed below is guidance you and members of your community can provide to undocumented immigrants to help put them in the best situation possible.

- *Meet with an immigration legal services provider to get screened for forms of relief:* Undocumented individuals and their families may be eligible for relief from removal. In fact, a [recent study](#) by the Center for Migration Studies found that 14% of individuals screened for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program were potentially eligible for permanent immigration status.¹

Undocumented immigrants should make an appointment to get screened by a recognized immigration legal service provider and ensure that their case is reviewed by an immigration attorney in good standing or an accredited representative.

- *Apply for citizenship if you are eligible:* According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), [over 8 million](#) immigrants in United States are eligible for citizenship² but have yet to [apply](#). Catholic communities, such as parishes in the Diocese of Orange, Los Angeles, San Bernardino and San Diego, have recently launched a program to provide assistance to 1.5 million lawful permanent residents in southern California who are eligible for citizenship. The program offers legal workshops with immigration attorneys, provides classes to prepare individuals for the citizenship examination, and raises funds to help pay their naturalization application fee when needed. (Note: the [fees for naturalization](#) will be changing, and in some instances increasing, on December 23, 2016).³

- *Avoid immigration scams and notario fraud:* Individuals need to be particularly vigilant about immigration scams at this time. You can share the following information and resources with undocumented individuals in your community:
 - **Applications:** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), the government entity that processes immigration applications in the United States, continues to process all applications, petitions, and requests consistent with current statutory laws, regulations, and policies. If individuals need general information about immigration benefits or current policies, they can “Ask Emma” at uscis.gov.
 - **Legal Assistance:** Individuals should be careful to obtain assistance from a qualified immigration attorney or legal services provider. Visit the [Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. \(CLINIC\)](#)⁴ website to locate a reputable organization near you. Learn more about immigration scams and notario fraud by looking at the [USCIS](#)⁵ and the [Executive Office for Immigration Review](#)⁶ websites. More information on notario fraud and how to file a complaint can also be found [here](#).⁷
- *Learn about your rights in an enforcement situation:* Undocumented individuals should educate themselves on their rights when interacting with immigration officers.
 - If an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer comes to their residence, the individual may refuse to open the door until the officer presents them with a warrant with their name and address on it. The individual can ask the officer to slide the warrant under the door.
 - Individuals have the right to remain silent and do not have to answer the officer’s questions.
 - Individuals can demand to speak to their legal counsel and can refuse to sign any documents until they have spoken with their attorney.
 - Detailed information on immigrants’ rights can be found in English [here](#)⁸ or in Spanish [here](#).⁹
- *Organize your family’s documents and points of contact:* Undocumented individuals should ensure that they are organized and that they gather identification documents, and documents related to any interactions with immigration officials, law enforcement, or courts of law. They should make copies of these documents and confirm that family members or trusted friends can access to them. They should memorize or carry the phone number of a person they trust and, if applicable, their legal representative. They should make sure their children also carry a trusted contact’s number.

More information about what undocumented individuals can do to protect themselves can be found [here](#)¹⁰ in English and [here](#)¹¹ in Spanish. You can also share these know your rights [videos](#)¹² with individuals in your community as well.

What guidance can we provide to DACA recipients?

On September 5, 2017 the Trump Administration attempted to end DACA, allowing one-time renewal for those whose status was set to expire between September 5, 2017 and March 5, 2018. While the attempt to terminate DACA is now the subject of litigation and multiple nationwide

preliminary injunctions, these injunctions or halts, are currently only partial and temporary. They do not allow for new DACA applicants to apply and only effect those who currently have DACA. Individuals can offer the following guidance to DACA recipients:

- *Meet with an immigration legal services provider if:*
 - You wish to discuss what your immigration options are;
 - You are considering applying for a renewal of DACA; or
 - You are planning travel outside of the United States.
- *Seek support from the Church and from your community:* DACA recipients should reach out to their local parishes and seek support from local community groups and the Church. Please see [Catholic Charities USA](#) (CCUSA)¹³ for counseling services near you. Also, be sure to check your local church for counseling sessions as well.
- *Try to Focus on Engaging in Your Daily Routine:* Individuals should continue to go to school, work, and church and continue their daily routines to the extent possible. They should try and not let the future uncertainty interrupt this semester of their studies, their work obligations, or their participation in church and community activities.

What guidance can we provide to refugees?

It is important to tell refugees in your community to:

- *Continue to work to integrate into your new community:* Refugees should continue to study English, engage with their communities, learn new things about the United States, and work to support themselves and their families.
- *Report Hate Crimes:* Not all communities have seen a recent increase in crime targeted at immigrants and refugees, however, we are deeply saddened to see that some in our country are engaging in acts of hate against foreigners. The Church does not condone such behavior. If a refugee in your community is threatened or assaulted, urge them to immediately call the police. Advise them to provide the responding officer with a detailed description of the incident. Victims should also report the offense to their [local Federal Bureau of Investigations \(FBI\) office](#).¹⁴ There are several government agencies that have existing resources that can be helpful, including information on:
 - [Reporting to the FBI:](#) The FBI's Civil Rights Division makes investigating hate crimes its highest priority. Read more [here](#).¹⁵
 - [Asking for Help:](#) If you have questions or concerns in your community, contact the Department of Justice's [Community Relations Service \(CRS\)](#) at (202) 305-2935 or locate your local office [here](#).¹⁶

How can we be supportive of immigrants and refugees at this time?

- *Host a solidarity event or interfaith prayer service:* Our communities need to come together to welcome immigrants and refugees. Solidarity events are a great way to make immigrants and refugees in our communities feel supported. They are also an opportunity to further educate parishioners and community members on our government's immigration and refugee-related policies. Interfaith prayer services offer meaningful solidarity. See Archbishop Gomez's [Homily Prayer Service for Hope and Unity](#).¹⁷ More information about hosting a bilingual Spanish-English solidarity event can be found [here](#).
- *Engage in dialogue about Catholic Social Teaching on migration:* Start a dialogue with your community around Catholic Social Teaching on migration. Share a copy of and discuss the pastoral letter [Strangers No Longer Together on the Journey of Hope](#).¹⁸
- *Pray together:* Now, more than ever, immigrants and refugees in the United States and abroad need our prayers. You can dedicate a mass to immigrants in your community, lead a homily on migration, and distribute prayer cards. See our materials [here](#).
- *Host a multicultural potluck night:* Promote cultural awareness and foster a community of welcome by hosting a multicultural potluck event.
- *Participate in Multicultural Celebrations of our Church:* Learn about the Church's immigrant history by attending mass on the [Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe](#) on December 12th, the [Feast Day of St. Frances Cabrini](#) on November 13th, and the [Feast Day of St. Kateri Tekakwitha](#) on July 14th.
- *Educate members of your community and ask them to take action on the Justice for Immigrants (JFI) website:* Share a [link to the JFI website](#)¹⁹ with members of your community so they can learn more about JFI's work to support refugees and immigrants. Ask them to keep an eye out for action alerts posted on the JFI website – these are a quick and easy way for parishioners to make their voices heard!
- *Engage in National Migration Week:* Urge your community and parish to review our National Migration Week [toolkit here](#) and learn about ways they can take action.²⁰

Endnotes:

- ¹ *Study by Center for Migration Studies Indicates that Significant Percentage of Unauthorized Immigrants May Be Eligible for Permanent Status*, CENTER FOR MIGRATION STUDIES (Dec. 4, 2014), <http://cmsny.org/press-release-cmsstudy-indicates-significant-percentage-of-unauthorized-immigrants-may-be-eligible-for-permanent-status/>.
- ² Nancy Rytina, *Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2012*, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (July 2013), available at https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois_lpr_pe_2012.pdf.
- ³ *USCIS releases final fee increases for immigration-related applications*, CLINIC, <https://cliniclegal.org/resources/uscis-releases-final-fee-increases-immigration-related-applications>.
- ⁴ *Affiliate Map and Listing*, CLINIC, <https://cliniclegal.org/directory>.
- ⁵ *Avoid Scams*, USCIS (Aug. 16, 2016), <https://www.uscis.gov/avoid-scams>.
- ⁶ *EOIR's Programs to Fight Fraud, Abuse, & Ineffective Representation in Immigration Proceedings*, DOJ (March 2016) <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/pages/attachments/2016/03/30/eoirsprogramstofightfraudabuseandineffectiverepresentationfactsheet032016.pdf>.
- ⁷ *Unauthorized Practice of Immigration Law*, CLINIC, <https://cliniclegal.org/notario> (last visited Nov. 16, 2016).
- ⁸ CASA of Maryland et al., *Know Your Rights!*, ADMINISTRATIVE RELIEF RESOURCE CENTER (Nov. 18, 2014), <https://www.adminrelief.org/resources/item.543575-Know>Your>Rights>English>.
- ⁹ CASA of Maryland et al., *Know Your Rights!*, ADMINISTRATIVE RELIEF RESOURCE CENTER (Nov. 18, 2014), <https://www.adminrelief.org/resources/item.543576-Know>Your>Rights>Spanish>.
- ¹⁰ Justice for Immigrants, *Nine Ways to Protect Yourself*, <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Nine-Ways-to-Protect-Yourself-English.pdf>.
- ¹¹ Justice for Immigrants, *Nueve Maneras de Protegerse*, <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Nine-Ways-to-Protect-Yourself-Spanish-FINAL-5.25.17.pdf>.
- ¹² USCCB/MRS, *Know Your Rights Videos*, <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/home/news/video-resources/>.
- ¹³ *The Catholic Charities Network*, CCUSA, <https://catholiccharitiesusa.org/network> (last visited Nov. 16, 2016).
- ¹⁴ *Contact Us*, FBI, <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us> (last visited Nov. 22, 2016).
- ¹⁵ *What We Investigate: Hate Crimes*, FBI, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes> (last visited Nov. 22, 2016).
- ¹⁶ *CRS: Regional and Field Offices*, DOJ, <https://www.justice.gov/crs/about-crs/regional-and-field-offices> (last visited Nov. 22, 2016).
- ¹⁷ Most Reverend José H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles, *Homily — Prayer Service for Hope and Unity*[i] Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, November 10, 2016, http://www.la-archdiocese.org/archbishop/Documents/2016-1110_Homily_PrayerService.pdf (last visited Nov. 23, 2016).
- ¹⁸ *Strangers No Longer: Together on a Journey of Hope*, A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States (January 23, 2003).
- ¹⁹ You can access the JFI website at: www.JusticeForImmigrants.org.
- ²⁰ USCCB/MRS, *National Migration Week Toolkit*, http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/documents/NMW-2017Toolkit_000.pdf.