



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

Transitioning to a New Administration: How Can We 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 working with the new administration to ensure that refugees and immigrants are humanely welcomed to the United States without sacrificing our nation's security. In a statement supported by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle and then-Chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Migration, stated: "We will work to promote humane policies that protect refugees and immigrants' inherent dignity, keep families together, and honor and respect the laws of this nation." Read the full statement [here](#).
- *Our Catholic community provides welcome, understanding, and spiritual guidance:* The Catholic community stands with immigrant and refugees. We welcome all and offer them spiritual support and comfort during this period of uncertainty.

What guidance can we provide to undocumented immigrants?

At this time, we do not know what will occur when the new administration assumes office. In the interim, 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.

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 a BIA 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 citizenship¹ 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).

- *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. \(CLINIC\)](#) website to locate a reputable organization near you. Learn more about immigration scams and notario fraud by looking at the [USCIS](#) and the [Executive Office for Immigration Review](#) websites. More information on notario fraud and how to file a complaint can also be found [here](#).
- *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](#) or in Spanish [here](#).
- *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 have 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.

What guidance can we provide to DACA recipients?

We do not definitely know how, or if, the new administration will repeal the program. Despite not knowing what will ultimately happen to the program, individuals can still offer the following guidance:

- *Meet with an immigration legal services provider if:*
 - You are considering applying for DACA and are not a current recipient;
 - 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) 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?

We do not know how the new administration will revise the current refugee program. In the interim, 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](#). 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](#).

- **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](#).

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

- ***Host a solidarity event or interfaith prayer service:*** Our communities must 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 and on the hardships faced by many of these migrants. See Archbishop Gomez’s recent [Homily Prayer Service for Hope and Unity](#).
- ***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](#).
- ***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 Ethnic Celebrations of the 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](#) 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.