

**From the Justice and Peace Commission  
ON WHICH SIDE OF THE FENCE DO YOU STAND?  
Carl J. Malischke**

Our government refuses to give legal status to 42 percent of the dairy farm workforce here in Wisconsin! That means that the milk you poured on your cereal this morning was brought to you by someone who is not authorized to provide it to you. Yet without that worker the Wisconsin farmer would go out of business and you would not have your dairy products. Why would someone in Mexico travel a couple thousand miles to milk cows in Wisconsin?

One-third of the entire population of the country of El Salvador, one-third, has left their country, and over 400 Salvadorans continue to leave each day, suffering an expensive and dangerous journey to get to the United States! Why would one third of a nation's population leave their homeland?

Our immigration policy puts heavy emphasis on enforcement of existing law. Because of that approach we're spending billions of tax dollars on building and maintaining miles of walls on our southern border. We now have over 17,000 Border Patrol agents along our Southern border at an annual cost of \$2.7 billion dollars.

As a result, human trafficking occurs in remote crossing points. Immigrants cross the desert where many die of thirst and heat. At least 5,607 deaths occurred between 1994 and 2008. People are dying on our back porches, and we are shutting and locking the door, watching in silence from our kitchen table while we drink our coffee.

And what is the reality for those immigrants living and working in our midst? In New York harbor a mighty woman with a torch proclaims: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me..."

Today, our country all too often ignores that proclamation. For many of today's immigrants we offer a life of living in the shadows, fear, intimidation, family separation, home raids, workplace raids, hate crimes, jail time, detention centers, and deportation.

But, they've broken the law, you say. It's our system of immigration that is breaking people. Our immigration policies are way out of step with the realities of our world.

As Christians, our starting point should not be the law. God's highest criterion is compassion. The starting point for Jesus, and his main concern, is the suffering of the people. "The Church sees these as moral issues in relation to our Judeo-Christian tradition of welcoming the stranger and looking to help those who are most in need in our society. Biblical justice is rooted in and evaluated upon how we treat those who are most vulnerable among us. In the Hebrew scriptures we hear this every time we hear the call to protect the widow, the orphan and the stranger."<sup>1</sup>

This is not just a crisis for our country. This is a crisis of our faith, for those of us who call ourselves Christians, followers of Christ, disciples of Jesus. The immigrant situation is defining our nation, our church, and us as human beings and as Christians. This is really not about the immigrant; it's about me; it's about us. We Catholics cannot stand on the sidelines, indifferent to the social sins that plague our nation and our world. We must cry out for comprehensive immigration reform, reform that:

- Recognizes that the current Militarized Border Enforcement Strategy is a failed policy;
- Addresses the status of undocumented persons currently living in the US;
- Makes family unity and reunification the cornerstone of the US immigration system;
- Allows workers and their families to enter the US to live and work in a safe, legal, orderly, and humane manner through an Employment-Focused immigration program; and
- Recognizes that root causes of migration lie in environmental, economic, and trade inequities.

We need comprehensive immigration reform! Now is the time! Make your voices heard! Our faith demands it!

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<sup>1</sup> Fr. Andy Cribben, a Norbertine priest from St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere, speaking at the Safe Roads rally in Madison June 22, 2009.