

# Immigrant and Community Integration: Fulfilling Catholic Social Teaching and American Values



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CATHOLIC LEGAL  
IMMIGRATION  
NETWORK, INC.

“Integrating concerns the opportunities for intercultural enrichment brought about by the presence of migrants and refugees. Integration is not ‘an assimilation that leads migrants to suppress or to forget their own cultural identity. Rather, contact with others leads to discovering their ‘secret’, to being open to them in order to welcome their valid aspects and thus contribute to knowing each one better. This is a lengthy process that aims to shape societies and cultures, making them more and more a reflection of the multi-faceted gifts of God to human beings’ ... I reiterate the need to foster a culture of encounter in every way possible – by increasing opportunities for intercultural exchange, documenting and disseminating best practices of integration, and developing programs to prepare local communities for integration processes.”

Message of Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018

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*On the Cover:*

*CLINIC affiliate Building One Community's Skills Development Program assists foreign-born residents with career training in culinary and home healthcare services.*





*Hartford Public Library, a BIA Recognized CLINIC affiliate in Connecticut, hosts a citizenship ceremony.*

## INTRODUCTION

Faith and community-based organizations have always worked on the front lines to address many of the most critical issues that affect immigrants. This includes creating families through spousal petitions, reunifying relatives under extraordinary circumstances and defending some of the world's most vulnerable people on the move, including refugees, asylum seekers, and survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence. A pinnacle of these efforts is assisting legal permanent residents in applying for naturalization and becoming active U.S. citizens. This step both welcomes the foreign-born and is a way to work together toward an integrated community.

Faced with these immediate needs, broader work on promoting immigrant integration and creating cohesive integrated communities is often overlooked. Scarce resources, lack of awareness or misunderstanding the definition of integration and what it looks like are all contributing factors. However, the importance of integration cannot be overstated. The integration of immigrants both among themselves and with their receiving communities directly affects the overall well-being of families for generations. Their new hometowns and the nation as a whole will benefit.

The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., has a key role to play in establishing, promoting, and furthering integration efforts. Immigrant integration falls squarely in line with Catholic social teaching and the ideas that the Catholic Church promotes around human dignity, family and community. The principal of subsidiarity encourages integration in partnership with CLINIC's extensive and diverse national network of immigrant assisting nonprofits. CLINIC and its member organizations principally serve the immigration legal needs of hundreds of thousands of people a year. Integration begins

when immigrants first enter the United States and continues as they establish themselves or move to different communities. Obtaining legal status is, for many, an important hurdle on the path to fitting into their new country. Therefore, beyond providing legal assistance the CLINIC network also involves immigrants and welcoming communities in myriad initiatives to strengthen families and help achieve the dream of being American citizens.

The purpose of this document is to provide a better understanding of immigrant integration as a concept and to better contextualize it in the work that CLINIC does because of its roots in Catholic social teaching. This paper addresses four main questions: What is integration and what does it look like? Why is it important? How does it fit into the work that CLINIC does? How does it fit with Catholic social teaching and the values of the Catholic Church globally and in the United States?

## WHAT INTEGRATION IS AND IS NOT

Integration is a human phenomenon, revealed in a many ways. Evidence of integration can be seen at all levels of society. It takes place on the front porches of homes where neighbors of various backgrounds socialize. It exists in macro data sets about English language proficiency, naturalization rates, voting participation levels, inter-ethnic marriages, home ownership, and economic progress between generations.

It's so ubiquitous that it is difficult to define in a few words or identify with a short list. CLINIC's Center for Immigrant Integration has adopted the definition used by Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, or GCIR, describing it as:

“A dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities.”

This definition goes beyond the simplified concept of assimilation or acculturation, which imply that the burden of change is on immigrants alone to adapt to their new society and its customs while discarding their own. Integration is more dynamic than this outmoded definition. It is more contemporarily viewed as a shared effort, wherein shaping and improving the larger community is the responsibility of immigrants and existing members alike. Furthermore, defining specific integration initiatives should not be a process determined in isolation by one individual or organization for others to heed. Rather it addresses the needs of newcomers and the broader community alike with contributions from all involved. Central to CLINIC's thinking on integration is the belief that integration work is most effective when shaped and done at the local level. CLINIC believes that integration initiatives work best when driven by an assets-based approach rather than a deficit model.

## WHAT INTEGRATION CAN LOOK LIKE

Integration takes place every day at macro and micro levels wherever newcomers and people who were there first meet. It is typically most visible at the local level. But regional and national data help to





*Hope Community Center, a CLINIC affiliate, created the Adelante Caminantes Program to offer not only legal and English help, but hot meals, counseling, academic assistance and training for other life skills.*

define and measure it more broadly. For example:

- More than 700,000 new citizens are naturalized each year;
- English as a Second Language students become more proficient in English and the national Census captures that.

Whichever definition is used, prominent academics argue that key components of integration include employment, housing, education, health, social connections, language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability, and rights and citizenship.<sup>1</sup> For CLINIC's purposes, helping integration initiatives to take root requires more concrete examples that stress the two-way give-and-take nature of integration work. They might include:

- A local parish hosts a coffee and conversation event, where newcomers and parishioners practice English and learn about each other's' cultures.
- A local community organization greets newly arrived refugee families at the airport with a home-cooked meal and an escort to their new home.
- A local nonprofit conducts focus groups and other information-gathering activities to learn what services newcomers need in order to feel more at home. It then collaborates with the newcomers to address those needs.
- A church runs a fundraiser, recruiting among new and existing members to chair the committees,

<sup>1</sup> Alastair Ager & Alison Strang, *Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework*, Volume 21, Issue 2 JFS, 166, 169 (2004).

market the event, collect the money, and decide what to do with the funds.

- A demographically changing community sees its first foreign-born person elected to office such as the parent-teachers association or city council.
- A nonprofit learns that immigrant clients need a form of identification to use city services. It works with the government local places of business, the local police force and the immigrant community to create the necessary ID.
- A city council identifies integration as a primary goal and works with all levels of the public and government stakeholders to create a multi-year city-wide immigrant integration plan.
- Immigrants and native-born citizens successfully advocate for the federal government to create a path to legal status for a large class of immigrants.

CLINIC seriously considers not only the definition of integration and what it looks like but also evaluates and measures it. There are many ways to comprehensively identify and measure integration, particularly as immigrant populations become more diverse and complex, and local or national policy efforts at change.

Some legitimate indicators include rates of attaining citizenship, English language proficiency, employment, membership or participation in community organizations, along with self-reporting from immigrants about how comfortable they feel where they have settled. Integration efforts are more discernable when they clearly tie into the broader society and promote community cohesiveness. Robust monitoring and evaluation methods must be developed and used to effectively communicate these outcomes and to ensure support for such programs. CLINIC's challenge is also to effectively communicate the full scope of how integration programs benefit local and national stakeholders alike.

## WHY INTEGRATION MATTERS

An integrated community offers its residents equality, justice, security, a sense of belonging, access to essential resources, and opportunities to succeed using their God-given talents. Integrated communities and nations are more cohesive and thereby more able to pursue the common good. In the United States, it helps ensure that American values are realized, as defined in our Constitution, principles of democracy, government and private institutions and faith traditions. In fact, those who see all humans as a unique form of creation and desire to live by the Golden Rule, are in a way talking about integration. Integration work directly supports biblically-based values and Catholic social teaching on migration, namely, the church's efforts to accept and welcome the foreign-born and to strengthen the bonds of family.

Knowing why integration is important is the start of advancing the concept through all aspects of private and public life. When human life is cherished and people are welcomed on their journeys is evidence that integration is a widely accepted value.

# HOW INTEGRATION SUPPORTS THE TEACHINGS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In 2013 on the 99<sup>th</sup> annual World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed:

“Where migrants and refugees are concerned, the Church and her various agencies ought to avoid offering charitable services alone; they are also called to promote real integration in a society where all are active members and responsible for one another’s welfare...”<sup>2</sup>

Pope Benedict’s message highlights a greater aspiration for the church to approach immigrant integration in a more holistic way that involves all members of society. This emphasis on integration comes not just from a desire to see a greater communal solidarity and prosperity but is firmly rooted in Catholic social teaching. Promoting immigrant integration directly supports the church’s call to welcome the stranger, by empowering newcomers with the tools and resources they need to be successful in the host society. Through this, the host society is also transformed into a more hospitable, diverse, and successful community. Integration also supports the church’s call to family, community, and participation. With many people’s participation, integration initiatives strengthen families. This in turn fortifies communities while building ties among individual members. While many immigration initiatives focus on newly arrived immigrants, it is the responsibility of everyone in the community to encourage and enable integration. The benefits of integration efforts extend to the entire parish, neighborhood, town or country and promote the common good.

## HOW INTEGRATION FITS INTO CLINIC’S WORK

CLINIC, as a Catholic national nonprofit, has a mission in support of “welcoming the stranger.” CLINIC’s Center for Immigrant Integration brings integration efforts across its network of nonprofits and into neighborhoods. It aims to standardize understanding and ideals about integration. Building on local inspiration, CLINIC engages in capacity building for the church and its local partnering nonprofits through training (knowledge), technical assistance (tools) and resource development (expansion). It works to identify and evaluate models and replicate efforts. The Center offers new content on its website, often in the form of stories, events and resources.

While the Center for Immigrant Integration is CLINIC’s main avenue for integration initiatives,

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<sup>2</sup> Benedictus PP. XVI, Message of His Holiness Pop Benedict XVI For The World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2013) (Dec. 21, 2018, 3:37 PM), [w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/migration/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20121012\\_world-migrants-day.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20121012_world-migrants-day.html)





*CLINIC affiliate, FaithAction International House, celebrates their Multicultural Thanksgiving with food, singing and dancing. This is the longest running event of FaithAction's "stranger to neighbor" integration model.*

integration work is a significant component of all CLINIC's work. Whether through legal representation of individual immigrants or working more broadly with parishes and local or national organizations, these efforts contribute to beginning the integration process. CLINIC has more than 30 years of experience creating, funding, and supporting organizations whose work ultimately serves to promote immigrant integration. Many are led and/or staffed by immigrants. This deep and broad experience of empowering the foreign-born and immigrant advocacy organizations makes CLINIC well-suited to expand and extend integration programming. We are positioned to bring training, awareness, and overall capacity to community based organizations all over America.

## CONCLUSION

Since its founding, CLINIC has excelled at equipping local groups and nonprofit organizations to welcome the foreign-born. This helps unite and strengthen families—particularly those that are poor and vulnerable—and defend newcomers who are vulnerable due to natural disasters, wars, inhumane laws or systems that impede the common good. CLINIC has a deliberate strategy to broaden purposeful immigrant integration efforts. Our strategy builds upon both the church's call to welcome newcomers and upon the U.S. history as a place where people from around the world are welcomed and given a chance to succeed. Combined, it should be a model for the world to emulate.

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## **ABOUT THE CATHOLIC LEGAL IMMIGRATION NETWORK, INC.**

Grounded in Catholic social teaching, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., is the largest network of community-based nonprofit immigration legal programs, with 330 affiliates in 47 states and the District of Columbia. CLINIC's principal services include legal and management training for our affiliates, advocacy for humane immigration policies, representing foreign-born religious workers, and leading several national projects to protect the rights and promote the dignity of immigrants. We also provide some pro bono representation to detained individuals and families, and offer public education materials on immigrants' rights and Catholic teaching on migration.



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