



Modern Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration: Notable Quotes



CATHOLIC LEGAL
IMMIGRATION
NETWORK, INC.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern Catholic social teaching is the body of social principles and moral teaching that is articulated in the papal, conciliar, and other official documents issued since the late nineteenth century and dealing with the economic, political, and social order. This teaching is rooted in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as well as in traditional philosophical and theological teachings of the Church.

The following excerpts are from the encyclical and conciliar documents that are typically considered core texts, as well as some key teaching documents issued by national bishops conferences and Vatican congregations, which contribute to the ongoing development of Catholic social teaching. The excerpts in this document are instances where the documents touch on immigration issues. The depth and richness of Catholic social teaching is best understood through a direct reading of these documents.

This document will be updated periodically. Last updated March 2023.

QUOTES FROM MAJOR DOCUMENTS

Pope Leo XIII, “Rerum Novarum” (1891)

Often considered the first great social encyclical, this seminal work addresses the plight of workers in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. In it, Leo XIII calls for the protection of the weak and the poor through the pursuit of justice while excluding socialism and class struggle as legitimate principles of change. It affirms the dignity of work, the right to private property, and the right to form and join professional associations.

“The following duties bind the wealthy owner and the employer: not to look upon their work people as their bondsmen, but to respect in every man his dignity as a person ennobled by Christian character. They are reminded that, according to natural reason and Christian philosophy, working for gain is creditable, not shameful, to a man, since it enables him to earn an honorable livelihood; not to misuse men as though they were things in the pursuit of gain, or to value them solely for their physical powers – that is truly shameful and inhuman.” (#20)

“Rights must be religiously respected wherever they exist, and it is the duty of the public authority to prevent and to punish injury, and to protect every one in the possession of his own. Still, when there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration.” (#37)

“...[N]oone would exchange his country for a foreign land if his own afforded him the means of living a decent and happy life.” (#47)

Pope Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution “Exsul Familia Nazarethana” (1952)

Considered a magisterial magna carta on migration, Exsul Familia lays out the challenges of and principles for providing spiritual assistance to migrants.

“The migrant Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph, living in exile in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil.” (Introduction)

Saint Pope John XXIII, “Mater et Magistra” (1961)

Applying the teachings of his predecessors to modern problems and affirming the role of the Church as a teacher, John XXIII in Mater et Magistra calls for a greater awareness of the need for all peoples to live as one community and to address the imbalance between the rich and poor and the harsh conditions of workers in rural, agricultural economies.

“[I]f the whole structure and organization of an economic system is such as to compromise human dignity, to lessen a man’s sense of responsibility or rob him of opportunity for exercising personal initiative, then such a system, We maintain, is altogether unjust—no matter how much wealth it produces, or how justly and equitably such wealth is distributed.” (#83)

“The solidarity of the human race and Christian brotherhood demand the elimination as far as possible of these discrepancies. With this object in view, people all over the world must co-operate actively with one another in all sorts of ways, so as to facilitate the movement of goods, capital and men from one country to another” (#155)

Pope John XXIII, “Pacem in Terris” (1963)

Often considered the “rights” encyclical, John XXIII covers the spectrum of relations between individuals, public authorities, and the world community and affirms the inviolability of human rights.

“Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own state. When there are just reasons for it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership to the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men.” (#25)

“... [O]f its very nature, civil authority exists, not to confine its people within the boundaries of their nation, but rather to protect, above all else, the common good of the entire human family.” (#98)

“Now among the rights of a human person there must be included that by which a man may enter a political community where he hopes he can more fittingly provide a future for himself and his dependents. Wherefore, as far as the common good rightly understood permits, it is the duty of that state to accept such immigrants and to help to integrate them into itself as new members.” (#106)

“[T]he public and universal authority, too, must have as its fundamental objective the recognition, respect, safeguarding, and promotion of the rights of the human person.” (#139)

Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “Gaudium Et Spes” (1965)

This most authoritative document in Catholic social teaching presents an ethical framework for the Church’s commitment to pastoral work and service in a rapidly changing world.

“In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception, and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign laborer unjustly looked down upon, a refugee,...or a hungry person who disturbs our conscience by recalling the voice of the Lord, ‘As long as you did it for one of these the least of my brethren, you did it for me’” (Matt. 25:40). (#27)

“... [W]hen workers come from another country or district and contribute by their labor to the economic advancement of a nation or region, all discrimination with respect to wages and working conditions must be carefully avoided. The local people, moreover, above all the public authorities, should all treat them not as mere tools of production but as persons, and must help them to arrange for their families to live with them and to provide themselves with decent living quarters. The native should also see that these workers are introduced into the social life of the country or region which receives them.” (#66)

Pope Paul VI, “Populorum Progressio” (1967)

Calling attention to the worsening marginalization of the poor, Paul VI presents the various dimensions of an integral human development and the necessary conditions for growth in the solidarity of peoples.

“We cannot insist too much on the duty of giving foreigners a hospitable reception. It is a duty imposed by human solidarity and by Christian charity, and it is incumbent upon families and education institutions in the host nations...[T]hey should be welcomed in the spirit of brotherly love” (#67)

“Emigrant workers should also be given a warm welcome. Their living conditions are often inhuman, and they must scrimp on their earnings in order to send help to their families who have remained behind in their native land in poverty.” (#69)

Pope Paul VI, “Octogesima Adveniens” (1971)

Realizing the need for a genuine renewal in domestic and international societal structures, in this apostolic letter Paul VI calls on Christians to live up to the duty of participation in social and political reform as a way of discovering the truth and living out the Gospel.

“Right to emigrate: We are thinking of the precarious situation of a great number of emigrant workers whose condition as foreigners makes it all the more difficult for them to make any sort of social vindication, in spite of their real participation in the economic effort of the country that receives them. It is urgently necessary for people to go beyond a narrowly nationalist attitude in their regard and to give them a charter which will assure them a right to emigrate, favor their integration, facilitate their professional advancement and give them access to decent housing where, if such is the case, their families can join them.

“Linked to this category are the people who, to find work, or to escape a disaster or a hostile climate, leave their regions and find themselves without roots among other people.

“It is everyone’s duty, but especially that of Christians, to work with energy for the establishment of universal brotherhood, the indispensable basis for authentic justice and the condition for enduring peace: “We cannot in truthfulness call upon that God who is the Father of all if we refuse to act in a brotherly way toward certain men, created to God’s image. A man’s relationship with God the Father and his relationship with his brother men are so linked together that Scripture says: ‘He who does not love does not know God’ (1 Jn. 4, 8)”. (#17)

Synod of Bishops, “Justicia in Mundo” (1971)

Calling attention to the structural roots of injustice afflicting human relations, the Bishops declare that action in the pursuit of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are constitutive elements in the Church’s mission of preaching the Gospel.

“Take, for example, the case of migrants. They are often forced to leave their own country to find work, but frequently find the doors closed in their faces because of discriminatory attitudes, or, if they can enter, they are often obliged to lead an insecure life or are treated in an inhuman manner. The same is true of groups that are less well off on the social ladder such as workers and especially farm workers who play a very great part in the process of development.

“To be especially lamented is the condition of so many millions of refugees, and of every group or people suffering persecution--sometimes in institutionalized form--for racial or ethnic origin or on tribal grounds. This persecution on tribal grounds can at times take on the characteristics of genocide.” (#21-22)

Saint Pope John Paul II, “Laborem Exercens” (1981)

The most systematic exposition on the nature of work by any pope, Laborem Exercens calls on Christians everywhere to be involved in the transformation of existing socio-economic systems. Saint John Paul II presents work as a fundamental dimension of human existence through which the “social question” must be viewed.

“Man has the right to leave his native land for various motives--and also the right to return--in order to seek better conditions of life in another country. This fact is certainly not without difficulties of various kinds. Above all it generally constitutes a loss for the country which is left behind. It is the departure of a person who is also a member of a great community united by history, tradition and culture; and that person must begin life in the midst of another society united by a different culture and very often by a different language. In this case, it is the loss of a subject of work, whose efforts of mind and body could contribute to the common good of his own country, but these efforts, this contribution, are instead offered to another society which in a sense has less right to them than the person’s country of origin...

“Every possible effort should be made to ensure that it may bring benefit to the emigrant’s personal, family and social life, both for the country to which he goes and the country which he leaves. In this area much depends on just legislation, in particular with regard to the rights of workers. It is obvious that the question of just legislation enters into the context of the present considerations, especially from the point of view of these rights...

“The most important thing is that the person working away from his native land, whether as a permanent emigrant or as a seasonal worker, should not be placed at a disadvantage in comparison with the other workers in that society in the matter of working rights. Emigration in search for work must in no way become an opportunity for financial or social exploitation.” (#23)

Saint Pope John Paul II, “Sollicitudo Rei Socialis” (1987)

Expanding on the notion of development in Populorum Progressio, Saint John Paul II reviews the state of world development in the past two decades and urges authentic development.

“Solidarity... is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” (#38)

Saint Pope John Paul II, “Centisimus Annus” (1991)

Concluding the first century of modern social teaching, Centisimus Annus builds on the ideas of Leo XIII and engages the themes of worker rights, private property and the common good, the role of the state, and the preferential option for the poor.

“Love for others, and in the first place love for the poor, in whom the Church sees Christ himself, is made concrete in the promotion of justice. Justice will never be fully attained unless people see in the poor person, who is asking for help in order to survive, not an annoyance or a burden, but an opportunity for showing kindness and a chance for greater enrichment.” (#58)

Saint Pope John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae” (1995)

Because the heart of social teaching is human dignity, Saint John Paul II lists the many forms of assault to human dignity and acts that violate life to disrupt social order.

“We cannot but think of today’s tendency for people to refuse to accept responsibility for their brothers and sisters. Symptoms of this trend include the lack of solidarity towards society’s weakest members-such as the elderly, the infirm, immigrants, children- and the indifference frequently found in relations between the world’s peoples even when basic values such as survival, freedom and peace are involved.” (#8)

Pope Benedict XVI, “Deus Caritas Est” (2005)

In this encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI connects the mystery of God’s love for us to our love for one another, especially those who are poor.

“Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbor. The concept of ‘neighbor’ is now universalized, yet it remains concrete. Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now. The Church has the duty to interpret ever anew this relationship between near and far with regard to the actual daily life of her members. Lastly, we should especially mention the great parable of the Last Judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46), in which love becomes the criterion for the definitive decision about a human life’s worth or lack thereof. Jesus identifies himself with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (Mt 25:40). Love of God and love of neighbor have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.” (#15)

“Charity workers need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbor will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6).” (# 31 a)

Pope Benedict XVI, “Sacramentum Caritatis” (2007)

This apostolic exhortation expounds on the sacrament of the Eucharist as it is to be believed, to be celebrated, and to be lived.

“Each celebration of the Eucharist makes sacramentally present the gift that the crucified Lord made of his life, for us and for the whole world. In the Eucharist Jesus also makes us witnesses of God’s compassion towards all our brothers and sisters. The Eucharistic mystery thus gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbor...” (#88)

Pope Benedict XVI, “Caritas in Veritate” (2009)

In this encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI turns to the theme of integral human development in the context of the worldwide financial crisis, reflecting on economic and social issues.

“No country can be expected to address today’s problems of migration by itself. We are all witnesses of the burden of suffering, the dislocation and the aspirations that accompany the flow of migrants. The phenomenon, as everyone knows, is difficult to manage; but there is no doubt that foreign workers, despite any difficulties concerning integration, make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country through their labour, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the money they send home. Obviously, these labourers cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.” (#62)

Pope Francis, “Evangelii Gaudium” (2013)

This apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis focuses on the Church’s mission of evangelization in the modern world, including obligations to the poor and the duty to establish just social orders.

“Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society.” (#186)

“Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all. For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis. How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralysing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new factor of development! How attractive are those cities which, even in their architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favour the recognition of others!

“I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God’s cry: “Where is your brother?” (Gen 4:9). Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour? Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity.” (#210-211)

Pope Francis, “Laudato Si” (2015)

A landmark social encyclical, Laudato Si calls for the radical conversion of hearts, minds, and lifestyles to care for our Earth and avert disaster on a global scale.

“For example, changes in climate, to which animals and plants cannot adapt, lead them to migrate; this in turn affects the livelihood of the poor, who are then forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty for their future and that of their children. There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. Sadly, there is widespread indifference to such suffering, which is even now taking place throughout our world. Our lack of response to these tragedies involving our brothers and sisters points to the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and women upon which all civil society is founded.” (#25)

“A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted. This compromises the very meaning of our struggle for the sake of the environment. It is no coincidence that, in the canticle in which Saint Francis praises God for his creatures, he goes on to say: “Praised be you my Lord, through those who give pardon for your love”. Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.” (#91)

Pope Francis, “Amoris Laetitia” (2016)

This apostolic exhortation from Pope Francis, known in English as “The Joy of Love,” focuses on the holiness of love in the family, and includes reflection on the need to prioritize the wellbeing of migrant families.

“Human mobility, which corresponds to the natural historical movement of peoples, can prove to be a genuine enrichment for families that migrate and countries that welcome them. Furthermore, forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes of a journey that often puts lives at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families. In accompanying migrants, the Church needs a specific pastoral program addressed not only to families that migrate but also to those family members who remain behind.” (#46)

Pope Francis, “Fratelli Tutti” (2020)

Pope Francis’ encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, or “Brothers and Sisters All,” was released during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on the need for a society transformed by commitment to human fraternity and social solidarity.

“Complex challenges arise when our neighbor happens to be an immigrant. Ideally, unnecessary migration ought to be avoided; this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development. Yet until substantial progress is made in achieving this goal, we are obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfillment. Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. For “it is not a case of implementing welfare programs from the top down, but rather of undertaking a journey together, through these four actions, in order to build cities and countries that, while preserving their respective cultural and religious identity, are open to differences and know how to promote them in the spirit of human fraternity.” (#129)

“This implies taking certain indispensable steps, especially in response to those who are fleeing grave humanitarian crises. As examples, we may cite: increasing and simplifying the granting of visas; adopting programs of individual and community sponsorship; opening humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable refugees; providing suitable and dignified housing; guaranteeing personal security and access to basic services; ensuring adequate consular assistance and the right to retain personal identity documents; equitable access to the justice system; the possibility of opening bank accounts and the guarantee of the minimum needed to survive; freedom of movement and the possibility of employment; protecting minors and ensuring their regular access to education; providing for programs of temporary guardianship or shelter; guaranteeing religious freedom; promoting integration into society; supporting the reuniting of families; and preparing local communities for the process of integration.” (#130)

“For those who are not recent arrivals and already participate in the fabric of society, it is important to apply the concept of “citizenship,” which “is based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice. It is therefore crucial to establish in our societies the concept of full citizenship and to reject the discriminatory use of the term minorities, which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority. Its misuse paves the way for hostility and discord; it undoes any successes and takes away the religious and civil rights of some citizens who are thus discriminated against.” (#131)

“The arrival of those who are different, coming from other ways of life and cultures, can be a gift, for “the stories of migrants are always stories of an encounter between individuals and between cultures. For the communities and societies to which they come, migrants bring an opportunity for enrichment and the integral human development of all every other human being...” (#133)

“Indeed, when we open our hearts to those who are different, this enables them, while continuing to be themselves, to develop in new ways. The different cultures that have flourished over the centuries need to be preserved, lest our world be impoverished...” (#134)

“...Here I would mention some examples that I have used in the past. Latino culture is ‘a ferment of values and possibilities that can greatly enrich the United States,’ for ‘intense immigration always ends up influencing and transforming the culture of a place... In Argentina, intense immigration from Italy has left a mark on the culture of the society, and the presence of some 200,000 Jews has a great effect on the cultural ‘style’ of Buenos Aires. Immigrants, if they are helped to integrate, are a blessing, a source of enrichment and new gift that encourages a society to grow.” (#134)

OTHER PAPAL AND VATICAN STATEMENTS OF NOTE

Sacred Congregation for Bishops, “Instruction on the Pastoral Care of People Who Migrate” (1969)

“Migrations ... give witness to and promote the unity of the human family, and confirm that communion of brotherhood among peoples ‘in which each party is at the same time a giver and a receiver.’” (#2)

“... [W]here a State which suffers from poverty combined with great population cannot supply such use of goods to its inhabitants, or where the State places conditions which offend human dignity, people possess a right to emigrate, to select a new home in foreign lands, and to seek conditions of life worthy of man. This right pertains not only to individual persons, but to whole families as well Public authorities unjustly deny the rights of human persons if they block or impede emigration or immigration, except where grave requirements of the common good, considered objectively, demand it.” (#7)

Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, “The Church and Peoples on the Move” (1978)

“Emigrants, on account of the peculiarly universal nature of the Church, are not outsiders.”

“The Church, ‘sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among men,’ (Gaudium et Spes) feels herself to be closely involved in the evolution of civilization of which mobility is a striking feature, and questions herself about the demands made on her presence in this new world, a world which in a certain sense, reflects her own personality as a pilgrim on the face of the earth.”

Message of Saint Pope John Paul II for Lent 1990, “Refugees Are Neighbors (Sept. 8, 1989)

“[Refugees must be guaranteed] the right to establish a family or to be reunited with their families; to have a stable, dignified occupation and a just wage; to live in dwellings fit for human beings; to receive adequate education for their children and young people, as well as adequate health care.”

Speech of Saint Pope John Paul II to the General Assembly of the International Catholic Migration Commission (July 5, 1990)

"It is necessary to restate that, for migrants or refugees as for all other human beings, rights are not based primarily on juridical membership in a determined community, but, prior to that, on the dignity of the person"

"The Catholics who place themselves at the service of migrants and of refugees cannot forget that they are the disciples of Him who is recognized by the attributes of the Good Samaritan and who himself affirms to us that He identifies himself with the poor and the stranger."

"Everyone must have a conversion of heart and there must be a conversion among communities as well. This conversion will be real when people understand that service to one's brothers and sisters is not merely a secondary 'good deed', but that it is strictly tied to the personal relationship of the Christian with his or her Lord, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life that there may be one flock."

Pontifical Council “Cor Unum” and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, “Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity” (1992)

“Joseph’s brothers went down into Egypt, driven by a devastating famine (Gn. 42:1-3); the people of Judah, defeated in war, were ‘taken into exile out of their land (2 K 25:21); Joseph took Jesus and his mother and fled by night to Egypt because King Herod was searching for the child to destroy him (Mt. 2:13-15); ‘That day a bitter persecution started against the church in Jerusalem, and everyone except the apostle fled to the country districts of Judea and Samaria (Ac 8:1.)’” (#1)

“In the case of the so-called economic migrants, justice and equity demand that appropriate distinctions be made. Those who flee economic conditions that threaten their lives and physical safety must be treated differently from those who migrate to improve their position.” (#4)

“The problem of refugees must be confronted at its roots, that is, at the level of the very causes of exile. The first point of reference should not be the interests of the State or national security but the human person, so that the need to live in community, a basic requirement of the very nature of human beings, will be safeguarded.” (#9)

“Any person in danger who appears at a frontier has a right to protection.” (#10)

“The exercise of the right to asylum ... should be recognized everywhere and not obstructed with deterrent and punitive measures.” (#13)

“No person must be sent back to a country where he or she fears discriminatory action or serious life-threatening situations.” (#14)

“Indifference constitutes a sin of omission. Solidarity helps to reverse the tendency to see the world solely from one’s point of view.” (#16)

“The tragedy of refugees is ‘a wound which typifies and reveals the imbalance and conflicts of the modern world.’ It shows a divided world that is far from that ideal according to which ‘if one member suffers, all suffer together’ (1 Cor. 12:26). The Church offers her love and assistance to all refugees without distinction as to religion or race, respecting in each of them the inalienable dignity of the human person created in the image of God (cf. Gn 1:27).” (#25)

Message of Saint Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day, 1996-1997: “Faith Works Through Charity” (Aug. 21, 1996)

“The task of proclaiming the word of God, entrusted by Jesus to the Church, has been interwoven with the history of Christian emigration from the very beginning. In the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, I recalled that ‘in the early centuries, Christianity spread because Christians, traveling to or settling in regions where Christ had not yet been proclaimed, bore courageous witness to their faith and founded the first communities there.’ This has also happened in recent times...Today the trend in migratory movement has been as it were inverted. It is non-Christians, increasingly numerous, who go to countries with a Christian tradition in search of work and better living conditions, and they frequently do so as illegal immigrants and refugees ... For her part, the Church, like the Good Samaritan, feels it her duty to be close to the illegal immigrant and refugee, contemporary icol of the despoiled traveler, beaten and abandoned on the side of the road to Jericho. (Lk 10:30).” (#2)

“This is the Church’s missionary path: to go to meet women and men of every race, tongue and nation with friendship and love, sharing their conditions in an evangelical spirit, to break the bread of truth and charity for them.... It is the apostolic style which shines through the missionary experience of the first Christian communities ... [Paul] active in the city of Corinth whose population was largely composed of immigrants working in the port, is urged by the Lord not to be afraid, to continue to ‘speak and not to be silent’ and to trust in the saving power of the wisdom of the Cross (1 Cor. 1:26-27).” (#4)

Speech of Pope Francis to the Bishops of the United States of America (Sept. 23, 2015)

“My second recommendation has to do with immigrants. I ask you to excuse me if in some way I am pleading my own case. The Church in the United States knows like few others the hopes present in the hearts of these “pilgrims”. From the beginning you have learned their languages, promoted their cause, made their contributions your own, defended their rights, helped them to prosper, and kept alive the flame of their faith. Even today, no American institution does more for immigrants than your Christian communities. Now you are facing this stream of Latin immigration which affects many of your dioceses. Not only as the Bishop of Rome, but also as a pastor from the South, I feel the need to thank and encourage you. Perhaps it will not be easy for you to look into their soul; perhaps you will be challenged by their diversity. But know that they also possess resources meant to be shared. So do not be afraid to welcome them. Offer them the warmth of the love of Christ and you will unlock the mystery of their heart. I am certain that, as so often in the past, these people will enrich America and its Church.”

Address of Pope Francis to a Joint Meeting of the United States Congress (Sept. 24, 2015)

“Here too I think of the march which Martin Luther King led from Selma to Montgomery fifty years ago as part of the campaign to fulfill his “dream” of full civil and political rights for African Americans. That dream continues to inspire us all. I am happy that America continues to be, for many, a land of “dreams.” Dreams which lead to action, to participation, to commitment. Dreams which awaken what is deepest and truest in the life of a people.

“In recent centuries, millions of people came to this land to pursue their dream of building a future in freedom. We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you are also descended from immigrants. Tragically, the rights of those who were here long before us were not always respected. For those peoples and their nations, from the heart of American democracy, I wish to reaffirm my highest esteem and appreciation. Those first contacts were often turbulent and violent, but it is difficult to judge the past by the criteria of the present. Nonetheless, when the stranger in our midst appeals to us, we must not repeat the sins and the errors of the past. We must resolve now to live as nobly and as justly as possible, as we educate new generations not to turn their back on our “neighbors” and everything around us. Building a nation calls us to recognize that we must constantly relate to others, rejecting a mind-set of hostility in order to adopt one of reciprocal subsidiarity, in a constant effort to do our best. I am confident that we can do this.

“Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions. On this continent, too, thousands of persons are led to travel north in search of a better life for themselves and for their loved ones, in search of greater opportunities. Is this not what we want for our own children? We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal. We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’

“This Rule points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us. The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development.”

“In this land, the various religious denominations have greatly contributed to building and strengthening society. It is important that today, as in the past, the voice of faith continue to be heard, for it is a voice of fraternity and love, which tries to bring out the best in each person and in each society. Such cooperation is a powerful resource in the battle to eliminate new global forms of slavery, born of grave injustices which can be overcome only through new policies and new forms of social consensus.”

Address of Pope Francis at Independence Mall (Sept. 26, 2015)

"I take this opportunity to thank all those, of whatever religion, who have sought to serve the God of peace by building cities of brotherly love, by caring for our neighbors in need, by defending the dignity of God's gift of life in all its stages, by defending the cause of the poor and the immigrant. All too often, those most in need of our help are unable to be heard. You are their voice, and many of you have faithfully made their cry heard. In this witness, which frequently encounters powerful resistance, you remind American democracy of the ideals for which it was founded, and that society is weakened whenever and wherever injustice prevails.

"Among us today are members of America's large Hispanic population, as well as representatives of recent immigrants to the United States. I greet all of you with particular affection! Many of you have emigrated to this country at great personal cost, but in the hope of building a new life.

"Do not be discouraged by whatever challenges and hardships you face. I ask you not to forget that, like those who came here before you, you bring many gifts to your new nation. You should never be ashamed of your traditions. Do not forget the lessons you learned from your elders, which are something you can bring to enrich the life of this American land.

"I repeat, do not be ashamed of what is part of you, your life blood. You are also called to be responsible citizens, and to contribute fruitfully to the life of the communities in which you live. I think in particular of the vibrant faith which so many of you possess, the deep sense of family life and all those other values which you have inherited. By contributing your gifts, you will not only find your place here, you will help to renew society from within."

Address of Pope Francis in Juárez (Feb. 17, 2016)

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has emphasized the need for humanitarian responses to migrants in all sorts of situations. In Mexico Feb. 12-17, 2016, he met with migrants and talked in various venues about the economic and social pressures that lead people to migrate.

In his homily during Mass Feb. 17 in Juárez, within sight of the U.S. border, Pope Francis tackled the complexities and the human tragedy of migration with stirring words, linking the plight of migrants with Jonah's call to repent and weep for those who suffer from injustice.

"Here in Ciudad Juárez, as in other border areas, there are thousands of immigrants from Central America and other countries, not forgetting the many Mexicans who also seek to pass over 'to the other side.' Each step, a journey laden with grave injustices: the enslaved, the imprisoned and extorted; so many of these brothers and sisters of ours are the consequence of a trade in human trafficking, the trafficking of persons.

"We cannot deny the humanitarian crisis which in recent years has meant migration for thousands of people, whether by train or highway or on foot, crossing hundreds of kilometers through mountains, deserts and inhospitable zones. The human tragedy that is forced migration is a global phenomenon today. This crisis which can be measured in numbers and statistics, we want instead to measure with names, stories, families. They are the brothers and sisters of those expelled by poverty and violence, by drug trafficking and criminal organizations. Being faced with so many legal vacuums, they get caught up in a web that ensnares and always destroys the poorest. Not only do they suffer poverty but they must also endure all these forms of violence. Injustice is radicalized in the young; they are 'cannon fodder,' persecuted and threatened when they try to flee the spiral of violence and the hell of drugs. And what can we say about the many women whose lives have been unjustly robbed?"

“Let us together ask our God for the gift of conversion, the gift of tears, let us ask him to give us open hearts like the Ninevites, open to his call heard in the suffering faces of countless men and women. No more death! No more exploitation! There is always time to change, always a way out and always an opportunity, there is always the time to implore the mercy of God.”

Jubilee Year of Mercy

Pope Francis declared a Jubilee of Mercy from Dec. 8, 2015 – Nov. 20, 2016. Throughout this year, he related mercy to issues of refugees and immigration many times.

“How many of our brothers and sisters are living in this time a real and dramatic situation of exile far from their homeland, with the rubble of their homes still in their eyes, with fear in their hearts and often, unfortunately, pain for the loss of loved ones?”

General audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican, March 16, 2016

“Today’s migrants who suffer out in the open, without food and cannot enter — they do not feel welcomed. I really like to see countries and governments who open their hearts and open their doors.”

General audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican, March 16, 2016

Statements for World Day of Migrants and Refugees

The Church has celebrated the World Day of Migrants and Refugees each year since 1914. This is an occasion for the Church and people of faith to reflect upon the role migration has played in our tradition, express concern for migrants, refugees, and people on the move, and build awareness about the challenges and opportunities migration presents.

The [Papal Messages of the World Day of Migrants and Refugees](#) compiled by CLINIC cover the rich history of statements issued by the Holy Father from 1996 to the present.

POPE FRANCIS QUOTES ON IMMIGRATION

“Migrants trust that they will encounter acceptance, solidarity, and help, that they will meet people who will sympathize with the distress and tragedy experienced by others, recognize the values and resources the latter have to offer, and are open to sharing humanly and materially with the needy and disadvantaged”

Message for the 2013 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Oct. 12, 2012.

“Migrants and refugees can experience, along with difficulties, new, welcoming relationships which enable them to enrich their new countries with their professional skills, their social and cultural heritage, and not infrequently, their witness of faith, which can bring a new energy and life to communities of ancient and Christian tradition, and invite others to encounter Christ and to come to know the Church”

Message for the 2013 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Oct. 12, 2012.

“The Church is Mother, and her motherly attention is expressed with special tenderness and closeness to those who are obliged to flee their own country and exist between rootlessness and integration. This tension destroys people. Christian compassion – this ‘suffering with’ compassion – is expressed first of all in the commitment to obtain knowledge of the events that force people to leave their homeland, and where necessary, to give voice to those who cannot manage to make their cry of distress and oppression heard. They are all elements that dehumanize and must push every Christian and the whole community to concrete attention”

Address to the Participants in the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, May 24, 2013.

Immigrants dying at sea, in boats which were vehicles of hope and became vehicles of death. That is how the headlines put it. When I first heard of this tragedy a few weeks ago, and realized that it happens all too frequently, it has constantly come back to me like a painful thorn in my heart. So I felt that I had to come here today, to pray and to offer a sign of my closeness, but also to challenge our consciences lest this tragedy be repeated. Please, let it not be repeated”

Homily at Lampedusa, July 8, 2013

“Where is your brother?” His blood cries out to me, says the Lord. This is not a question directed to others; it is a question directed to me, to you, to each of us. These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity. And their cry rises up to God! Once again I thank you, the people of Lampedusa, for your solidarity. I recently listened to one of these brothers of ours. Before arriving here, he and the others were at the mercy of traffickers, people who exploit the poverty of others, people who live off the misery of others. How much these people have suffered! Some of them never made it here”

Homily at Lampedusa, July 8, 2013.

Despite the problems, risks, and difficulties to be faced, great numbers of migrants and refugees continue to be inspired by confidence and hope; in their hearts they long for a better future, not only for themselves but for their families and those closest to them”

Message for the 2014 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 24, 2013.

"Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women, and men who leave or are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more"

Message for the 2014 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 24, 2013.

"We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not represent a problem to be solved, but they are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected, and loved. They are an occasion Providence gives us to help build a more just society, a more perfect democracy, a more unified country, a more fraternal works, and a more open and evangelical Christian community"

Message for the 2014 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 24, 2013.

"I will also pray in a special way for our brothers and sisters, men, women and children who have died of thirst, hunger or from the exhaustion on the journey to find a better life. In recent days we have seen those terrible images of the desert in the newspapers. Let us all pray in silence for these brothers and sisters of ours"

Angelus, Nov. 1, 2013.

"The Church without frontiers, Mother to all, spreads throughout the world a culture of acceptance and solidarity, in which no one is seen as useless, out of place, or disposable"

Message for the 2015 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 3, 2014.

"Often, however, such migration gives rise to suspicion and hostility, even in ecclesial communities, prior to any knowledge of the migrants' lives or their stories of persecution and destitution. In such cases, suspicion and prejudice conflict with the biblical commandment of welcoming with respect and solidarity the stranger in need"

Message for the 2015 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 3, 2014.

"It is necessary to respond to the globalization of migration with the globalization of charity and cooperation, in such a way as to make the conditions for migrants more humane"

Message for the 2015 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 3, 2014.

"From this perspective, it is important to view migrants not only on the basis of their status as regular or irregular, but above all as people whose dignity is to be protected and who are capable of contributing to progress and the general welfare...Migrations cannot be reduced merely to their political and legislative aspects, their economic implications and the concrete coexistence of various cultures in one territory. All these complement the defense and promotion of the human person, the culture of encounter, and the unity of peoples, where the Gospel of mercy inspires and encourages ways of renewing and transforming the whole of humanity"

Message for the 2016 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 12, 2015

"I would also like to draw attention to the tens of thousands of children who migrate alone, unaccompanied, to escape poverty and violence: This is a category of migrants from Central America and Mexico itself who cross the border with the United States under extreme conditions and in pursuit of a hope that in most cases turns out to be vain. They are increasing day by day. This humanitarian emergency requires, as a first urgent measure, these children be welcomed and protected"

Papal Message on the occasion of Mexico Holy See colloquium on human migration and development, July 14, 2014.

"American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination"

Speech at the White House of the United States, Sept. 23, 2015

"We still have time to make the changes needed to bring about 'a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change' (Laudato Si', 13). Such change demands on our part a serious and responsible recognition not only of the kind of world we may be leaving to our children, but also to the millions of people living under a system which has overlooked them. Our common home has been part of this group of the excluded which cries out to heaven and which today powerfully strikes our homes, our cities and our societies. To use a telling phrase of the Reverend Martin Luther King, we can say that we have defaulted on a promissory note and now is the time to honor it"

Speech at the White House of the United States, Sept. 23, 2015

"Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us"

Address of Pope Francis to a joint meeting of the United States Congress, Sept. 24, 2015

"On this continent, too, thousands of persons are led to travel north in search of a better life for themselves and for their loved ones, in search of greater opportunities. Is this not what we want for our own children? We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal"

Address of Pope Francis to a joint meeting of the United States Congress, Sept. 24, 2015

"[W]hen the stranger in our midst appeals to us, we must not repeat the sins and the errors of the past. We must resolve now to live as nobly and as justly as possible, as we educate new generations not to turn their back on our "neighbors" and everything around us"

Address of Pope Francis to a joint meeting of the United States Congress, Sept. 24, 2015

"Closeness to the poor, the refugee, the immigrant, the sick, the exploited, the elderly living alone, prisoners and all God's other poor, will teach us a different way of resting, one which is more Christian and generous"

Homily at St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, Sept. 24, 2015

"I know that it is not easy to have to move and find a new home, new neighbors and new friends. The good thing is that we also make new friends. We meet people who open doors for us, who are kind to us. They offer us friendship and understanding, and they try to help us not to feel like strangers. To feel at home"

Address to children at Our Lady Queen of Angels School, New York, Sept. 25, 2015

“Many of you have emigrated to this country at great personal cost, but in the hope of building a new life. Do not be discouraged by whatever challenges and hardships you face. I ask you not to forget that, like those who came here before you, you bring many gifts to your new nation...By contributing your gifts, you will not only find your place here, you will help to renew society from within”

Address of Pope Francis at Independence Mall, Philadelphia, Sept. 26, 2015

“This crisis which can be measured in numbers and statistics, we want instead to measure with names, stories, families. They are the brothers and sisters of those expelled by poverty and violence, by drug trafficking and criminal organizations. Being faced with so many legal vacuums, they get caught up in a web that ensnares and always destroys the poorest”

Address of Pope Francis in Juarez, Feb. 17, 2016

“How many of our brothers and sisters are living in this time a real and dramatic situation of exile far from their homeland, with the rubble of their homes still in their eyes, with fear in their hearts and often, unfortunately, pain for the loss of loved ones?”

General audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican, March 16, 2016

“[The care of migrants] is a great responsibility, which the Church intends to share with all believers and men and women of good will, who are called to respond to the many challenges of contemporary migration with generosity, promptness, wisdom and foresight, each according to their own abilities.

In this regard, I wish to reaffirm that “our shared response may be articulated by four verbs: *to welcome, to protect, to promote and to integrate*”

Message 2017 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 8, 2016

“Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age (Matthew 25:35-43). The Lord entrusts to the Church’s motherly love every person forced to leave their homeland in search of a better future. This solidarity must be concretely expressed at every stage of the migratory experience – from departure through journey to arrival and return”

Message for the 2018 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Aug. 15, 2017

“Migrants, especially those who are most vulnerable, help us to read the “signs of the times”. Through them, the Lord is calling us to conversion, to be set free from exclusivity, indifference and the throw-away culture. Through them, the Lord invites us to embrace fully our Christian life and to contribute, each according to his or her proper vocation, to the building up of a world that is more and more in accord with God’s plan”

Message for the 2019 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 29, 2019

“When we talk about migrants and displaced persons, all too often we stop at statistics. But it is not about statistics, it is about real people! If we encounter them, we will get to know more about them. And knowing their stories, we will be able to understand them. We will be able to understand, for example, that the precariousness that we have come to experience as a result of this pandemic is a constant in the lives of displaced people”

Message for the 2020 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 27, 2020

"Today's migration movements offer an opportunity for us to overcome our fears and let ourselves be enriched by the diversity of each person's gifts. Then, if we so desire, we can transform borders into privileged places of encounter, where the miracle of an ever wider 'we' can come about"

Message for the 2021 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 26, 2021

"No one must be excluded. God's plan is essentially inclusive and gives priority to those living on the existential peripheries. Among them are many migrants and refugees, displaced persons, and victims of trafficking. The Kingdom of God is to be built *with them*, for without them it would not be the Kingdom that God wants. The inclusion of those most vulnerable is the necessary condition for full citizenship in God's Kingdom"

Message for the 2022 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Sept. 25, 2022

"This is the second life jacket I have received as a gift. The first one was given to me a few years ago by a group of rescue workers. It belonged to a little girl who drowned in the Mediterranean. I then donated it to the two under-secretaries of the Section for Migrants and Refugees of the Department for Promoting Integral Human Development. I said to them, 'Here is our mission.' With this I wanted to signify the essential commitment of the Church to saving the lives of migrants, to be able to welcome, protect, promote and integrate them.

"This cross [here before us] is transparent: it is a challenge to look more carefully and always seek the truth. The Cross is luminescent: it is intended to strengthen our faith in the Resurrection, Christ's triumph over death. Even the unknown migrant, who died with the hope of a new life, shares in this victory. The rescuers have told me how they are learning humanity from the people they manage to save. They revealed to me how in every mission they rediscover the beauty of being one great human family, united in universal brotherhood"

Address of Pope Francis to a group of refugees in Lesbos, Greece, Dec. 19, 2019

"Allow me, brothers and sisters, to express a dream of my own: that you, who are migrants, after having received a welcome rich in human kindness and fraternity, will become in turn *witnesses and agents of welcome and fraternity*. Here, and wherever God wants, wherever his providence will lead you. That is the dream I want to share with you and which I place in God's hands. For what is impossible for us is not impossible for him. I believe it is most important that in today's world migrants become witnesses of those human values essential for a dignified and fraternal life"

Address of Pope Francis to a group of migrants in Malta, April 3, 2022

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[USCCB Catholic Social Teaching Webpage](#)

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[Justice for Immigrants Website](#)

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Octogesima Adveniens (A Call to Action) – Pope Paul VI, 1971

Justicia in Mundo (Justice in the World) – Synod of Bishops, 1971

Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) – Pope John Paul II, 1981

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concern) – Saint Pope John Paul II, 1987

Centesimus Annus (The Hundredth Year) – Saint Pope John Paul II, 1991

Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life) – Saint Pope John Paul II, 1995

Deus Caritas Est (God Is Love) – Pope Benedict XVI, 2005

Sacramentum Caritatis (Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist) – Pope Benedict XVI, 2007

Caritas in Veritate (In Charity and Truth) – Pope Benedict XVI, 2009

Evangelii Gaudium (Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel) – Pope Francis, 2013

Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home) – Pope Francis, 2015

Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love) – 2016

Fratelli Tutti (Brothers and Sisters All) – 2020

Other Papal and Vatican Statements of Note

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