

**Catholic Relief Services  
CRS Campus Connection  
Migration Discussion Guide**

**STRANGERS NO LONGER: Together on the Journey of Hope**

**PURPOSE OF PROGRAM:** To introduce participants to the major themes of the pastoral letter concerning migration, “Strangers No Longer.”

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** Copies of the “Strangers No Longer” document can be found at <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/pastoralstatements.htm>. The following discussion session should not be viewed as a replacement for the full letter, but seen as a companion piece.

**GATHERING PRAYER:**

**All:** Loving God, we thank you for bringing us together, so we may learn how to better to serve you and your people. Please bless our conversation, and grant us the gift of your wisdom.

In Christ's name we pray,  
Amen

**Reader 1:**

Migration is an issue that affects not only the Church of the United States, but also the Church world-wide. Recognizing that our faith crosses all boundaries, there has been great collaboration on the part of the Catholic Bishops in both the US and in Latin America to grapple with the needs of migrants and the communities affected by migration.

**Reader 2:**

There are currently an estimated 65 million Catholics in the United States, and roughly over 90 million in Mexico. The letter is directed to the Catholic faithful in both nations and to all people touched by migration, the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States composed a pastoral letter entitled, “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope.”

**Reader 3:**

The letter is divided into 4 separate sections. By reviewing some of the major points discussed, we will begin to shape an understanding of the Church's opinions on this complex subject.

**Questions:**

- *Have you ever attended mass in a different language? If so, what was that experience like? If not, what would you imagine it being like?*
- *In your opinion, how does the Catholic faith tradition cross cultural barriers?*
- *What does the universality of Catholicism mean to you?*

**Chapter 1:**

**“America: A Common History of Migration and a Shared Faith in Jesus Christ”**

**Reader 1:** The Bishops write, “We witness the vulnerability of our people involved in all sides of the migration phenomenon, including families devastated by the loss of loved ones who have undertaken the migration journey and children left alone when parents are removed from them.”

**Reader 2:** “We observe the struggles of landowners and enforcement personnel who seek to preserve the common good without violating the dignity of the migrant. And we share in the concern of religious and social service providers who, without violating civil law, attempt to respond to the migrant knocking at the door.” (4)

**Reader 3:** “Our common faith in Jesus Christ moves us to search for ways that favor a spirit of solidarity. It is a faith that transcends borders and bids us to overcome all forms of discrimination and violence so that we may build relationships that are just and loving.” (19)

**Questions:**

- *Expand on the Bishops' above statement, and make a list of all the people you can imagine being impacted when someone migrates to the United States?*

**Chapter 2:****“Reflections in the Light of the Word of God and Catholic Social Teaching”**

**Reader 1:** In many ways, the Hebrew Scriptures are rooted in the migration experience as well as how we are to treat strangers:

*“For the Lord, your God, is the . . . Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.” (Dt 10:17-19)*

**Reader 2:** Through scripture, the lived tradition of the Church, and so many of its members, the Church has been part of the migration dialog for hundreds of years. The Catholic Church in the United States carries a particularly notable legacy of being a church long composed of immigrant communities. Over this time, certain themes and principles have risen, that guide the Church's view on migration issues.

**Question:**

- *As you read the following sections which outline the basic Catholic Social Teaching on migration, imagine you were an undocumented migrant. Circle the words and/or phrases you find to be consoling?*

**Reader 3:**

**I.** Persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland. All persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.” (34)

**Reader 1:**

**II.** Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families. The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.” (35)

**Reader 2:**

**III.** Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders. The Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control their territories but rejects such control when it is exerted merely for the purpose of acquiring additional wealth. More powerful economic nations, which have the ability to protect and feed their residents, have a stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows.” (36)

**Reader 3:**

**IV.** Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection. Those who flee wars and persecution should be protected by the global community. This requires, at a minimum, that migrants have a right to claim refugee status without incarceration and to have their claims fully considered by a competent authority.” (37)

**Reader 1:**

**V.** The human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected. Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Often they are subject to punitive laws and harsh treatment from enforcement officers from both receiving and transit countries. Government policies that respect the basic human rights of the undocumented are necessary.” (38)

**Reader 2:**

In summary, all people should be able to live in dignity and meet their basic needs. This should preferably occur in all countries and actions should be taken to make this possible. However where such conditions do not exist people have the right to migrate to meet their needs. Though the Church recognizes the right of a sovereign state to control its borders, this needs to occur in the context of the common good and a generous response to migrants.

**Question:**

- *Discuss the items you circled. What else intrigued, impressed or surprised, you from this list?*

**Chapter 3:  
“Pastoral Challenges and Responses”**

**Question:**

- *The following is a list of broad recommendations put forth by the Bishops on ways the Catholic community can and should respond to immigrants. Within your personal community, which of these would be the hardest and which would be the least difficult to implement?*
  - “We call upon pastors and lay leaders to ensure **support** for migrant and immigrant families.
  - We urge communities to offer migrant families **hospitality**, not hostility, along their journey.
  - We commend church communities that have established **migrant shelters** that provide appropriate pastoral and social services to migrants.
  - We encourage Catholics and all people of good will to work with the community to **address the causes** of undocumented migration and to protect the human rights of all migrants.
  - We call on the local church to **help newcomers integrate** in ways that are respectful, that celebrate their cultures, and that are responsive to their social needs, leading to a **mutual enrichment** of the local church.
  - We ask that special **attention be given to migrant and immigrant children and youth** as they straddle two cultures, especially to give them opportunities for leadership and service in the community and to encourage vocations among them.
  - The Church on both sides of the border must **dedicate resources** to provide pastoral care for migrants who are detained or incarcerated. The presence of the Church within detention facilities and jails is an essential way of addressing the human rights violations that migrants may face when they are apprehended.
  - We encourage local dioceses to **sponsor pertinent social services** for migrants and immigrants, particularly affordable legal services.
  - In many rural dioceses, the primary site of pastoral outreach for farm workers is the migrant camp, usually at a significant distance from the parish church. In this context we encourage local parishioners to be prepared as **home missionaries** and the migrants themselves to be prepared as catechists and outreach workers.” (42)

## Chapter 4: Public Policy Challenges and Responses

**Reader 1:** Finally in this chapter, the Bishops put forth their specific policy recommendations for comprehensive migration reform that outlines a framework for safe, orderly, legal and generous migration policies. These policy proposals include: establishing a process for legalizing undocumented workers, a more generous visa program with particular attention to reuniting families, both permanent and temporary visa programs for laborers, basic labor rights, humane border enforcement policies, and just due process rights. These recommendations shall be dealt with in greater details in future Campus Advocate sessions.

**Reader 2:** For the Bishops of Mexico and the US, “the ideal situation for which the world and both countries must strive: one in which migration flows are driven by choice, not necessity. Paramount to achieving this goal is the need to develop the economies of sending nations, including Mexico.” (59)

### CONCLUSION

**Reader 3:** In the concluding thoughts of the pastoral letter, the Bishops turn to the words of the Holy Father from his 1995 World Migration Day message:

In the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere. As a sacrament of unity and thus a sign and a binding force for the whole human race, the Church is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters. It is the task of the various Dioceses actively to ensure that these people, who are obliged to live outside the safety net of civil society, may find a sense of brotherhood in the Christian community. Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble.

–Pope John Paul II, 1/2/03

**Question:**

- *If your community decided to dedicate itself to living the principle, “Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in trouble?” what would change in your community...in the U.S.,...in the world?*

**Sending Forth Prayer**

**All:** Creator God, you have shaped us all in your image and likeness. May the words of your Church strengthen and inspire us to recognize your presence in all who we meet. In the name of Christ we pray...Amen.

This program has been developed by staff members of US Operations at Catholic Relief Services.  
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