

Preparing for Legalization: General Information for Parishes

On May 10, 2005, the U.S. Catholic Bishops formally launched *Justice for Immigrants: The Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform* in an effort to educate the Catholic community, including Catholic public officials, on Catholic social teaching regarding immigrants. The goals of the campaign are to develop broad-based support amongst the public for a change in federal immigration law to permit undocumented immigrants to integrate into our society and to mobilize that broad-based support into legislative advocacy to Congress to change current immigration law.

When immigration law changes to permit the estimated 12 million undocumented people in the United States to come out of the shadows to join our society, we want the Catholic network to be able to compassionately and effectively meet the large increase in the demand for legalization services that will result.

What can you start doing now in your parish to prepare for this change in immigration law?

- Contact your local Catholic Charities or diocesan immigration legal service program to see if there is a coalition with the agency to prepare for legalization, and become involved with this coalition. If no coalition exists, ask what you can do to help get one started. You can locate the nearest Catholic immigration legal service provider by visiting the website for the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) at www.cliniclegal.org under the Public Directory of CLINIC members.
- Appoint someone within your parish to be the coordinator for legalization issues. This person can be responsible, among other things, for providing accurate information to your parishioners on immigration and legalization issues. S/he can obtain this information by collaborating with your local Catholic immigration legal service program and also by visiting CLINIC's legalization webpage at: <http://www.cliniclegal.org/Legalization.html>
- Be aware that to date, there is no change in federal immigration law. Therefore, there is no program yet for undocumented people to apply to legalize their status. You can adapt the attached flyer, "There is no Legalization Law," to provide local information for your community.
- Be aware that there are many unscrupulous immigration consultants or *notarios* out there who seek to take advantage of unsuspecting immigrants. These individuals take immigrants' money in exchange for preparing and filing "legalization" applications even though there is no legalization program to apply for. You can use the attached flyer, "Beware of Notarios," to warn undocumented people in your community about immigration fraud. This flyer also discusses who is authorized to provide immigration legal services.
- Realize that your parish office is **not** authorized by law to provide legal services to immigrants. Work closely with your local Catholic immigration legal service provider to distinguish between providing *public education* to the community and providing *legal advice* to the community. Often well-meaning but inexperienced parish workers try to help undocumented immigrants but instead inadvertently put the immigrant in deportation proceedings.
- Approach your local Catholic immigration legal service provider to request training for your staff and volunteers in basic immigration and legalization issues. If they are unable to provide you with training, please visit CLINIC's website for more information on legalization issues. The more you and your community know about how the current immigration law impacts the undocumented community now, the better prepared your parish will be to respond to a change in the immigration law.
- Offer to set up informational workshops and to recruit volunteers for when legalization passes.