

**LADIES ANCIENT ORDER OF HIBERNIANS
COMMITTEE ON POLITICAL EDUCATION
DRAFT POSITION STATEMENT**

MIGRATION/IMMIGRATION

Migration/immigration remains a consistent phenomenon throughout human history. Christians first witness forced migration when God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:23-24. Forced to go ‘anywhere else,’ this ‘push’ represents only one side of a multifaceted equation. For example, another Old Testament migration story in Exodus reminds us that migration/immigration can be perilous when leaving and/or entering hostile alien territory. In this case, the Israelites fled the subjugating Egyptians only to encounter the hostile resident Canaanites, Hittites, and others. The allure of a ‘Promised Land’ flowing with milk and honey (a ‘pull’) and God’s promise of protection and success proved adequate motivators to travel. We must not forget, too, that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus emigrated to Egypt in fear of King Herod’s wrath at the birth of a rival to his kingship (Matthew 2:1-15).

The history of immigration into what is now the United States is not so different. In the 1600s, Puritans and Pilgrims sought freedom from religious persecution and encountered the Native Americans, which often led to hostilities initially and ultimately resulted in the mass destruction of indigenous peoples and cultures. Since that time, wave after wave of immigrants who survive the perilous journey from afar encounter various degrees of welcome and contempt. In desperation to fit in and carve out a new life, immigrants often perform the ‘dirty’ jobs those more enculturated scorn, although this process is perhaps not more than one generation removed from their own ancestors’ dire circumstances and submission to the ‘system.’ Our Irish ancestors were but one of those groups.

Regarding immigration, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2241) teaches social justice that strives to achieve a very fine balance between protection of the ‘common good’ of a receiving sovereign nation while also welcoming ‘foreigners,’ deferring to the dignity of and respect for the human person. For the immigrant, ‘Guests are placed under the protection of those who

receive him.’ Responsibilities are stated as well, ‘Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and assist in carrying out its civic burdens.’ Without digressing into the semantics of the words ‘guest,’ ‘protection,’ ‘respect,’ and such, what remains clear is that these precepts are nested within the 4th Commandment, exactly where they are situated within the *Catechism* in Section IV. The Family and the Kingdom. Jesus’ New Law sums this up in Galatians 5:14.

In January 2003, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued a pastoral letter *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, which challenges US immigration policy and proposes mitigation strategies. This is available at <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/churchteachingonimmigrationreform>, which all LAOH ladies are encouraged to read. Reforms proposed include:

- Earned legalization allowing foreign nationals of good moral character living illegally in the U.S. to procedurally adjust their status to permanent resident as a path to citizenship;
- Future worker program which would allow foreign-born workers to enter the U.S. legally and safely while also providing worker protections while in residence;
- Family-based immigration reform, which includes increasing the number of allowed family visas and reduction of reunification wait times;
- Restoration of due process rights taken away by the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA);
- Addressing root causes of migration, ideally addressing and mediating socioeconomic conditions in sending countries; and
- Enforcement of laws to protect the U.S. from those who truly threaten public safety (e.g., drug and human traffickers, smugglers, and would-be terrorists) in a targeted, proportional, and humane manner.

The *Catechism* (2240) also states what is required of citizens: pay taxes, exercise the right to vote, and defend one’s country. Performing these three actions invests every citizen in one’s individual and collective present and future. It (2238) also states that citizens “have a right, and at times the duty, to voice their criticisms of that which seems harmful to the dignity of persons...”

The LAOH Political Education Committee's position on the issue of immigration is in alignment with that of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). We recognize that immigration is an extremely complex phenomenon and that many Catholic citizens feel helpless to confront, much less affect, the high-level legislative processes of border control, immigrant detention, family separations, and deportations. The LAOH membership also experiences and responds to contemporary immigration in a variety of ways largely based upon geographic location.

The LAOH Political Education Committee takes the position that our forest of family trees has roots in a variety of geographic locations and socioeconomic circumstances, welcoming as well as repellant. The point is that we are all here now as fellow travelers. Without money or marketable skills, many of our ancestors arrived here – America, their Promised Land! – on sheer guts and prayers. So, the next time a LAOH Sister encounters someone with a different shade of skin or an accent, please do not assume or immediately judge. Wonder, perhaps, “What’s *your* immigration story?” Offer a smile, say a prayer, love your neighbor as yourself, and vote in alignment with Christ’s and the *CCC* immigration precepts.