



BECAUSE WE ARE CATHOLIC

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CALIFORNIA SERVES AND ADVOCATES FOR THE POOR, VULNERABLE AND THOSE IN NEED NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE CATHOLIC, BUT *because we are Catholic.*



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.”

– Pope Francis, July 8, 2013

Welcoming the Stranger: Practical Advice for the Undocumented

When Diana Campos first came to live in the U.S., she was only an infant.

“I was born in Mexico and arrived in the U.S. a year later. I have lived here my whole life,” said Campos.

“Growing up undocumented I became accustomed to what it felt like to be an Americanized Mexican living in a society that did not fully accept me. I graduated from high school in 2012 and found myself with acceptance letters to colleges that I could not attend. I found myself driving in fear of being pulled over without my license. A lack of a work permit made me feel useless and my future looked dark,” she said. “I was stripped of basic rights, I, as a person of faith, knew every person was born with.”

As the new Administration continues to take action, the future of the almost 11 million undocumented individuals in the United States has become uncertain. An atmosphere of anxiety permeates some of our communities, where many fear their families will be torn apart and their lives shattered.

The Catholic Church believes that migrants must be welcomed with dignity and respect – as if we were greeting Christ himself. Migrants leave their home countries for a variety of reasons, with many escaping life-threatening war zones and extreme poverty. In the United States, and throughout the world, the Church devotes both pastoral and material assistance to “welcome the stranger.”

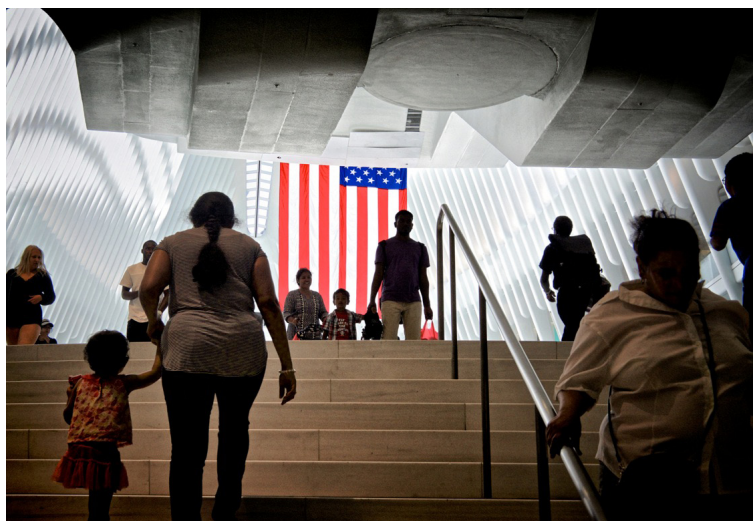
One of the most prominent worries is the fear that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of

Americans (DAPA) programs will be eliminated. DACA and DAPA are designed to provide undocumented persons who were brought to the United States when they were children with temporary relief from deportation (deferred action).

“DACA changed my life and view on life completely,” said Campos. “It helped me re-establish my mental health and allow me to see that I am useful by giving me a work permit and a social security number. I felt safer and that with DACA I could now give back to this country that has given me so much.”

If DACA is eliminated, more than 730,000 individuals who have been vetted and are tax-paying and contributing members of our communities would be subject to potential deportation.

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The following are steps that Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC), an organization with a dedicated network of Catholic and community legal immigration programs, and other similar groups, recommend undocumented citizens take to ensure that their rights are protected and affairs are in order:

1. GET SCREENED FOR OTHER FORMS OF RELIEF, INCLUDING NATURALIZATION

Undocumented individuals and their families may be eligible for relief from removal, but should only take the advice of a qualified legal professional. Catholic Charities in California, for instance, provides immigration services including DACA application and renewal assistance, naturalization application assistance and other immigration application assistance. CLINIC can also direct you to trustworthy legal representatives in your area.

Studies show that 14 percent of all DACA applicants are potentially eligible for permanent immigration status. More than eight million immigrants may be eligible for citizenship but have not applied. Several communities have launched immigration service programs.

Undocumented individuals should seek legal counsel to help determine whether applying for DACA or other forms of relief, including naturalization is the best option. Visit cliniclegal.org/directory to locate services near you.

2. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS IN ENFORCEMENT SITUATIONS

All individuals have rights regardless of immigration status. The best way for individuals and families at risk to protect themselves and their communities is for them to know their rights and prepare themselves before an encounter with law enforcement.

To ensure undocumented individuals are properly prepared for an emergency situation, it is important to organize identification documents, any documents or communication related to interactions with immigration officials, law enforcement or courts of law, as well as other important papers such as birth and marriage certificates. Also, have an emergency plan in place in the event that you are separated from your family.

3. AVOID SCAMS

In the United States, only attorneys and Department of Justice Accredited Representatives can provide legal advice and services about immigration. The term “notario publico” often creates confusion. In the United States, a “notary public” is someone who is only allowed to witness



the signing of official documents. They cannot give legal advice or provide immigration services.

Even small mistakes can result in severe consequences, including deportation, so seek only the advice of authorized professionals.

Finally, be mindful that proposed policies such as the BRIDGE Act is not yet law and do not provide any relief to immigrants.

The Administration continues to move forward with executive orders affecting immigration policy at a rapid pace. Therefore, all undocumented individuals should follow the advice above. It is never too soon to be prepared.

“For my family,” says Campos, “losing DACA would mean losing safety, losing income and losing faith in our leaders and government. It would mean starting all over again.”

FIND LEGAL HELP:

To find authorized legal immigration representation, visit the organizations below:

CLINIC’s website at cliniclegal.org

Catholic Charities of CA at catholiccharitiesca.org

KNOW YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS:

<http://tinyurl.com/ja94rc6>

(for Spanish version)

<http://tinyurl.com/gvqvo4j>

For these and other links to resources, please visit

California Catholic Conference
www.cacatholic.org/because-we-are-catholic