

Pope Francis and a Catholic Vision of Immigrant Integration

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We have been asked to speak on immigrant integration and responding to Pope Francis's call to create a culture of encounter and solidarity. I am particularly pleased to speak on this topic in Chicago where some of the very best work is being done on immigrant integration, well-being and empowerment. I will outline a Catholic vision of integration, describe the Catholic Immigrant Integration Initiative, and try to do justice to Pope Francis's inspiring vision.

Integration from a Catholic Perspective

We know that many of our nation's opinion makers characterize immigrants as a problem, a burden and a threat. This is not our vision. To us, immigrants are a gift and an opportunity. As Pope Francis put it quite beautifully, immigrants and refugees "are an occasion that Providence gives us to help build a more just society, a more perfect democracy, a more united country, a more fraternal world and a more open and evangelical Christian community." (Francis 2013a).

Going back to the Catholic Church's earliest days, here is how St. Paul described Jesus's ministry: "He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God." (Eph. 2: 17-19). The Church's mission – consistent with this teaching -- is to gather together God's scattered children. (Jn. 11:52).

What do we mean by integration and what are we trying to accomplish in this area? First, integration is a process devoted to creating the conditions that allow all to flourish, including people without immigration status. As the US bishops wrote in 1986: "It is against the common good and unacceptable to have a double society, one visible with rights and one invisible without rights." (NCCB 1986).

Second, we seek to promote "integral" development, the flourishing of each person and of the whole person; that is, in all of their social, spiritual, economic, political and other dimensions. As you well know, the Catholic Church in the United States has created institutions to meet all of these essential human needs and to honor this vision.

Third, we seek unity between peoples based on the shared, life-giving, Gospel values that are embedded (imperfectly) in diverse cultures. The Church does not privilege one culture over another: it seeks to evangelize all cultures. It seeks unity, not uniformity or assimilation into a dominant culture.

Fourth, our vision prioritizes human agency. We know that immigrants integrate, not institutions. In the words of Pope Francis: "Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more." (Francis 2013a). In his address at the United Nations, the Holy Father reminded us

that human development and dignity can never be imposed (Francis 2015a). Integration requires that we open our institutions to the leadership and gifts of immigrants, and that we promote the participation and success of immigrants in the broader society.

Thus, the Catholic Church locates the standard metrics of integration like socio-economic attainment, political participation, and citizenship within a broader vision of human flourishing, development, and communion based on shared faith and values.

The Challenge

The integration of immigrants in the United States is a massive challenge. There are 43 million foreign-born US residents, 75 million counting their children. They come from virtually every nation in the world. Eleven million lack immigration status and 8.6 million legal residents have not yet naturalized (Warren and Kerwin 2015).

Integration is a multi-generational challenge that can and should engage all of our institutions. It is the perfect challenge for Catholic institutions in that it implicates our core values and mission. From a practical perspective, we do not have to wait for Congress or the courts to engage in this work and the challenge will certainly not end with a broad legalization program.

Are we living up to this challenge individually and collectively? This is precisely the question posed by the [Catholic Immigrant Integration Initiative](#), in which CMS, the SC Ministry Foundation, CLINIC, and dozens of other Catholic agencies have been engaged these last three years. This initiative seeks to strengthen and expand the work of Catholic and other faith-based institutions with immigrants. The project's guiding insight is that immigrants need Catholic institutions, many of which were created by and for earlier generations of immigrants. And the Church, in turn, needs immigrants, who are revitalizing its institutions and could be playing an even more vital role in them.

The Catholic Immigrant Integration Initiative has five main goals. First, it tries to understand and document the work of Catholic institutions with immigrants. While we talk a lot about integrated services, in truth we tend to work in silos and do not know much about what our colleague institutions are doing. The project has produced an aptly titled book, *US Catholic Institutions and Immigrant Integration: Will the Church Rise to the Challenge?*, which represents a first foray into explaining and understanding the work of Catholic institutions in this area and outlining the challenge before us.

Second, the project identifies and disseminates promising programs, practices and ministries that advance immigrant integration, well-being and empowerment. It has featured ministries like *Pastoral Migratoria* in the Archdiocese of Chicago, which is a parish-based organizing program for evangelization, service and justice. It lifts up good practices like the importance of *madrinas* in attracting and serving immigrant families in Catholic elementary schools. Donna Carroll, President of Dominican University, will be speaking later today on making universities accessible and welcoming places for unauthorized students. The initiative has also highlighted the revitalization of Catholic labor priests and ministries, which played a crucial role in the Church's work with immigrants in the middle decades of the 20th century. In short, the initiative

identifies and promotes programs and ministries that should be widely known and replicated. Some of these can be found on our project webpage.

Third, we have dialogued extensively on how to evaluate the success of our work on integration. We will soon be conducting two surveys – one targeting parishes and elementary schools, and the second other Catholic charitable institutions – to identify model programs and practices and to look at how diverse institutions measure their success.

Fourth, we try to articulate the vision of communion that underlies and unifies the work of diverse institutions and ministries in this area. In a powerful lecture on ecclesial communion, Professor Hosffman Ospino said that:

All signs point to the good news that Hispanic, Asian, Caribbean, and Black immigrant Catholics, among many others, and their descendants want to *be* Church and *build* the Church in the United States. However, without a clear ecclesiology of communion that sincerely embraces the new immigrant experience and allows our Church to be challenged by that same experience, we may simply miss a golden opportunity. An ecclesiology of communion ... must be grounded in the conviction that we need to be communities of faith —families, parishes, schools, organizations— where we are constantly welcoming one another, together renewing the commitment to build the Church of today while planting the seeds of the Church of tomorrow (Ospino 2015).

Fifth, we are trying to create a robust community of Catholic leaders from diverse institutions who are committed to making integration a unifying Catholic priority. We invite all of you to join us. All these goals and activities are related. If the underlying vision is clear and compelling, effective models are well-known, metrics are in place, and strong leaders prioritize this challenge, then more good work will invariably follow.

Pope Francis's Vision

In his recent address before the US Congress, Pope Francis called us to see immigrants and refugees “as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation” and responding to them “in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal.” (Francis 2015b). “We need to avoid,” he said, “a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome.” (ibid.)

Since January of 2014, more than 5,600 human beings have perished in the Mediterranean Sea. Thousands more have died on the US-Mexico border, in Saharan desert, in the Aegean Sea and in the Andaman Sea. In his first papal trip to the island of Lampedusa, Pope Francis called for solidarity and a kind of radical empathy with migrants in need. He asked:

Has any one of us grieved for the death of these brothers and sisters? Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion –

"suffering with" others: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! (Francis 2013b)

In the same address, the Holy Father urged us to “remember the Golden Rule.” “This Rule,” he said, “points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and compassion with which we want to be treated...The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us.” (Francis 2015b).

During his US trip, Pope Francis repeatedly reminded us – in his words and deeds -- that building unity across “every barrier” is central to the Church’s mission (Francis 2015c). He urged us to treat the upcoming Holy Year of Mercy as “a privileged moment for strengthening communion, perfecting unity, reconciling differences, forgiving one another and healing every rift, that your light may shine forth like “a city built on a hill” (Mt 5:14).” (ibid.).

“We have been entrusted with a great responsibility, and God’s people rightly expect accountability from us,” he said. “But the true worth of our apostolate is measured by the value it has in God’s eyes...Ours is to plant the seeds: God sees to the fruits of our labors.” (Francis 2015d).

Pope Francis also charged us with “carrying forward the legacy of the past not primarily by maintaining our structures and institutions ... but above all by being open to the possibilities which the Spirit opens up to us and communicating the joy of the Gospel, daily and in every season of our life.” (Francis 2015e). He spoke as well of the need for “discerning and employing wisely the manifold gifts which the Spirit pours out upon the Church.” (ibid.). Immigrants, of course, are one of the gifts of the Spirit. Families, laborers and young people – to whom the Holy Father repeatedly paid tribute -- are also gifts.

Pope Francis has powerfully framed our time together and our work ahead. Here is his message on integration. See the human face; live the Golden Rule; constantly welcome; build unity across every barrier; strengthen communion; open ourselves to the gifts of the spirit; plant seeds and trust God to do the rest; empower do not impose; collaborate; and prioritize youth, families and laborers.

We have abundant work to do. Thus, let me end with [a prayer](#) to guard against complacency and to renew our commitment to this work. It goes:

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true, because we have dreamed too little, when we have arrived safely, because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us today, so that we can dream with you.

Thank you.

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