

In the 1979 document *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the Catholic bishops of the United States declared, “Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only external appearances which have changed.”

Today, over 35 years later, the sin of systemic racism is exemplified by our broken criminal justice system, which disproportionately arrests, imprisons, kills, and strips away the basic rights of people of color. Our faith teaches that all people are redeemable and possess inherent human dignity.

As members of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, we stand with the Catholic bishops and the Society of Jesus in calling for meaningful reforms to our nation’s criminal justice system that prioritize fairness, rehabilitation, and restoration of individuals rather than the current punitive system that produces disproportionately negative outcomes for communities of color.

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We believe a racially just criminal justice system should:

Ensure that law enforcement is carried out in a non-biased, accountable, and community-oriented manner.

- Ensure body-worn cameras are readily available to law enforcement agencies and appropriately used in the field.
- Condition federal funding to states and police departments on reporting fatal and nonfatal uses of force and other police-community encounters. Data should highlight the number of police encounters with people of color, women, youth, and people with disabilities; and be made publicly available.
- Create a federal prohibition on racial profiling and other biased policing.
- Provide financial incentives for police departments that implement implicit bias testing as part of their hiring practices.
- Promote training in de-escalation, crisis intervention, and countering implicit bias.
- Ensure law enforcement agencies only receive non-lethal equipment from the military.

Ensure defendants of color have access to affordable, equitable, and timely judicial proceedings.

- Create a funding stream to encourage states and municipalities to implement bail reforms.
- Provide sufficient financial support to states, local governments, and territories for the provision of public defense services comparable to federal support for prosecution.

Reform sentencing policies to reflect every individual’s God-given human dignity.

- Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences, since they remove a judge’s ability to examine each individual in light of their circumstances and severity of the crime.
- Abolish the death penalty. Pope Francis explicitly stated the Catholic Church’s opposition to the death penalty in his address to Congress. It disproportionately affects people of color, leaves no room for the possibility of rehabilitation, does not serve as a deterrent to crime, and wastes money.
- End life-without-parole sentences, especially for juveniles. Life without parole prevents opportunity for rehabilitation. Sentencing for juveniles is particularly cruel, and the U.S. is the only country to issue such sentences to children.

Reduce barriers that limit the economic and civil rights of leaving prison.

- End the lifetime bans that prohibit individuals with felony drug convictions from receiving SNAP (Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program), public housing, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), and other important programs. These programs form a critical safety net that allows returning citizens to find their footing in their community.
- Implement and encourage “Ban the Box” policies that prevent employers from inquiring about criminal records on job applications. Many people returning from prison are effectively barred from employment because many job applications require them to disclose their history of criminal records to even be considered.
- Restore voting rights in federal elections to individuals who are out of prison and living in the community, and notify people about their right to vote when they are leaving prison, sentenced to probation, or convicted of a misdemeanor.

The Ignatian Solidarity Network (ISN) is a national social justice education and advocacy network inspired by the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola. ISN was founded in 2004 and is a lay-led 501(c)(3) organization working in partnership with Jesuit universities, high schools, and parishes, along with many other Catholic institutions and social justice partners. Learn more at: ignatiansolidarity.net



The Ignatian Solidarity Network (ISN) urges the Congressperson to support humane, compassionate immigration policies by creating an accessible pathway to citizenship for all 11 million people without documentation; working to maintain family unity in all elements of the immigration system; protecting the most vulnerable, especially refugees and asylum seekers; respecting the rights of U.S. and immigrant workers; ensuring the human rights of immigrant families; and examining the root causes of migration and proposing long-term solutions.

We urge the Congressperson to oppose anti-immigrant attacks by supporting the Dream Act of 2017, which provides DACA recipients and other undocumented young people with a path to citizenship. In addition, rather than investing in detention, deportation, and border security, the Congressperson should place resources and cost savings into community-based alternatives to detention, which are critical to avoid re-traumatizing individuals who have escaped violence. These programs allow immigrants and refugees to live in supportive and safe environments while service providers guide them through the immigration process.

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BACKGROUND

Two years ago, Pope Francis reminded Congress, “In recent centuries, millions of people came to this land to pursue their dream of building a future in freedom. We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners...We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal.”

As members of the Ignatian Solidarity Network, we stand with the pope, the U.S. Catholic bishops, and the U.S. Jesuit provincials in asking for immigration policy that supports the family unity, provides a pathway to citizenship, and promotes humane and just treatment of immigrants. We also call on Congress to rethink policy that unnecessarily militarizes the border, which increases the vulnerability of individuals fleeing their countries in search of protection.

COMPASSIONATE IMMIGRATION POLICY SHOULD:

Provide undocumented young people with access to a path to citizenship in recognition that they are woven into the fabric of our country and are by every social and human measure, American youth. We support a path to citizenship for those with DACA and Temporary Protected Status, as well as other undocumented young people.

Create safe and humane communities by reducing the detrimental effects of detention and deportation on families. We oppose an increase in enforcement spending in the interior and on the border and believe that the U.S. has a responsibility to ensure that immigration law enforcement is professional, accountable, and humane. We must allow local law enforcement officials to focus on criminal laws, leaving civil codes to immigration officials. We also need more robust and transparent oversight of agencies responsible for immigration enforcement: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In addition, the United States must change its detention and deportation practices to preserve immigrants' dignity and safety. These changes should keep families together during the deportation process, inform individuals in their own language of their rights and how to complain about mistreatment, and allow Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to access CBP facilities. While the screening of CBP agents has greatly improved, reform proposals are needed to address the lack of sufficient screening of previously hired agents, as well as the improper training, oversight, and accountability of agents.

Commit to a long-term vision of humane and comprehensive reform of a broken system. Our faith teaches us that people have a right to migrate; this is not amnesty. People also have the right to remain in their homes and home country. The U.S. should examine the root causes of migration and address these factors with long-term solutions. For the approximately 11 million undocumented Americans currently living in the U.S., we must provide a realistic way for them to work toward citizenship while passing background checks, learning English, and paying taxes if they aren't already. It is the only smart, practical, faithful way to respond to our broken immigration system. The U.S. must also address the shortage of family-based visas and unreasonable wait times for people living in other countries wishing to join their families in the U.S.



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