

**Diocese of Honolulu** • Office of the Bishop • [www.catholichawaii.org](http://www.catholichawaii.org)  
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April 10, 2013

## REGARDING IMMIGRATION REFORM

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

Peace be with you!

My ancestors came to Hawaii among the first wave of Portuguese immigrants in the late 1800s to work on island plantations. Around the same time, hundreds of newcomers also came from China, Japan, the Philippines and other countries. The descendents of these groups, and later others, melded to become one of the most beautiful ethnically-blended societies on earth.

Thanks in large part to the Hawaiian people, who were hospitable nearly to the point of their own ruin, Hawaii gave birth to a vibrant new cultural blend, a preview of a future global village. While Hawaii's immigration story has not been totally free of prejudice and discrimination, as a whole it has been raised by the aloha spirit into an achievement of which we can be proud.

Today our country faces a serious immigration dilemma. The system is a mess. An estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants live an unsettled existence, while legal immigrants have to endure years separated from their families. Young men and women who were brought illegally into our country as children by their parents now live in a legal limbo. And some states have resorted to taking anti-immigration enforcement into their own hands.

Hawaii, though isolated by the vast Pacific Ocean, is also affected by our broken immigration system. Not only do we have undocumented residents among us, but many of our legal permanent residents often have to wait years, even decades, before their spouses, children and siblings are permitted to join them. This excessive hardship on our families could be easily fixed with more sensible laws.

Contrary to what many people think, undocumented immigrants pay taxes and contribute to the economy. At the same time, they are not permitted to take advantage of welfare or other public assistance and are less likely than legal citizens to commit crimes.

Except for Native Hawaiians and Native Americans, we are all immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. Today's newcomers are no different from us. They too want to work, raise and educate their families and enjoy a better life.

We did not become a great country by keeping people out, but rather by opening wide our doors. Our richness, energy and strength flow from diversity, new growth, progress, accommodation, and our welcoming, pioneering spirit.

I join the rest of the bishops in the United States in urging Congress to enact generous immigration reform that provides a fair pathway to citizenship, ends employer exploitation and keeps families together. I am not afraid of the word “amnesty” because it means forgiveness and compassion, values all Americans should promote. At the same time, I support appropriate requirements for citizenship.

In the end, we are all instructed by Jesus — who with his parents once lived as a refugee in Egypt — to “welcome the stranger.”

**How can you help welcome the stranger? Visit the Justice for Immigrants website at [justiceforimmigrants.org](http://justiceforimmigrants.org). to learn more about the position of our U.S. bishops and how to contact your federal officials with an electronic postcard. Or call your U.S. Senators at 202-224-3121 and U.S. Representatives at 202-225-3121 and urge them to support comprehensive immigration reform.**

God bless you and all the people of our land!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Larry Silva". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name below it.

Most Reverend Larry Silva  
Bishop of Honolulu