

Migration: Balancing our roles as citizens as well as disciples

By Douglas Alles

In an encyclical written shortly after Vatican II, St. Pope Paul VI identified the issue of human migration as central to emerging Christian social concern.

“We cannot,” he states, “insist too much on the duty of giving foreigners a hospitable reception; [this] is a duty imposed by human solidarity and by Christian charity.

The moment for action,” the Pope stated in 1967, “has reached a critical juncture.” *Populorum Progressio* 67; 80.

Fifty years later, the scale and complexity of this issue makes Saint Paul VI sound prophetic, if not understated.

Migration has always been a vexing challenge.

Europe, now at the center of great migratory pressure, is itself a composite of migration histories, noted in the journeys of the Angles, Saxons, Vikings, Franks, Goths, Visigoths, Huns, Vandals, and Normans across that continent. Even Native Americans are known to have European origins. And in nearly every instance, migration proved contentious and difficult.

What pressures people to leave established and familiar communities and homeland? Why are there more than 240 million people in compelled migration today – more than 3 percent of the world’s population?

Forced migration occurs because of financial pressures and material want (economic migration), persecution and war (refugees), or because people are lured by false promises of work into forced labor and exploitation (victims of human trafficking).

Further, many migrants are “internally displaced persons” who never leave their country but who live in camps of isolation and privation in their homeland.



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Because of economic, political, and environmental instability, the number of migrants is growing rapidly and may exceed 400 million people within the next 20 years.

This represents one of the single greatest challenges to human dignity and security in our lifetime – possibly in human history.

Economic disparity alone will continue as a primary cause of migration – 75 percent of the world’s population lives on less than \$10 a day. If, as the adage goes, capital doesn’t go to where the people are, then people will go to where the capital is.

With migration comes the topic of borders, not just in the U.S., but across the world. For many, the solution to human migration lies in border security, border walls, border enforcement and rapid border repatriation. Yet these physical and procedural border actions alone will fail to solve this “issue of our lifetime.” For that, we must take up the difficult task of addressing immigration in all its messy complexity.

That means facing another kind of border, the border zone of debate and tension.

Here we find the border between sovereign rights and human rights, civil law and natural law, national security and human insecurity, and, for Christians: citizenship and discipleship.

I believe that the Church has a valuable role to play in these border zones of tension by offering language and insight that will help us bridge the divisions we face.

The Church affirms the right of a nation to protect its borders and sovereignty. It also recognizes the right of people to a dignified life and, if necessary, a right to migrate to secure



that life.

We must hold legitimate sovereignty and basic human rights in balance.

The Church recognizes the role of **civil law**, which is the right of a nation to order and organize a system of laws that are directed to the common good.

The Church also affirms the existence of a **natural law**, the law of the “invisible heart,” which motivates parents to provide for their families – to feed, educate, and shelter them.

A nation has, as a basis for **national security**, the right to protect its inhabitants from harm, and violence, especially from outside forces.

National security, however, must also take notice of compelling **human insecurity** – the right of people to protect themselves and their families from undue need, hunger, and excessive poverty and vulnerability.

Finally, for the faithful, the Church recognizes the task of **citizenship**, which is the challenge to the people of a nation to fulfill the duties and expectations of being a member of that nation or state.

Alongside this duty, the Church proposes the demands of **discipleship** to her followers; the challenge to those of faith in Christ to respond, in solidarity and Christian love, to those

in need.

Migration is a great and common human experience. It touches on virtually all elements of our Catholic social doctrine which include all of the following: human dignity, solidarity, the common good, distributive justice, legal justice, commutative justice, social justice, the priority of labor (people) over capital, the preferential option and love for the poor, subsidiarity, the universal destination of goods, authentic development, the centrality of family, and the realization of personhood.

This doctrine of social teaching is a summary of our life in God and a call to “right connectedness” in our relations with each other. In the case of migration, it calls us to enter the hard border zones of this world with a Gospel message of love and justice and the Church’s perennial wisdom about human dignity and solidarity.

Let us bring a compassionate heart to the border zones of human migration, holding the tensions we find there with a love of neighbor. We are sure to find the Lord there as well.

Alles is executive director of Catholic Charities of Idaho

Q & A: U.S. Senator James Risch of Idaho

Idaho U.S. Senator James Risch, also a former governor and state legislator, now chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Risch is a practicing Catholic. The Idaho Catholic Register asked him the following questions:

What in your view are the essential elements of a comprehensive immigration reform package?

We must have border security and an organized entry program, so we can screen migrants entering and we must determine a reasonable limit, so our system of support is not overwhelmed.

Do you agree that young people here under DACA should not be deported (barring they have not committed any crimes) and that a solution should be found to letting them remain in this country?

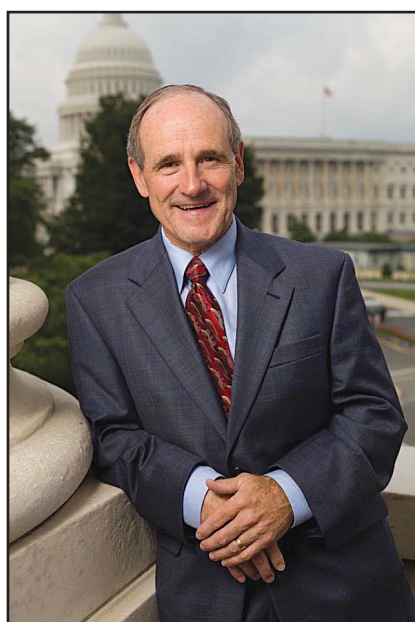
Yes, I believe a solution should be found to allow these young people to stay in our country.

How does your Catholic faith factor into your decision-making regarding this volatile issue? Although you may not agree at all times with statements from the bishops, are their comments helpful to you in trying to find a solution to this issue?

My Catholic faith teaches compassion for those

in need. I have to balance that with my beliefs on what is best for my state and my country and the people here in Idaho who I was elected to serve.

As you know, the agricultural economy in southern Idaho is dependent on foreign-born labor for much of the work that is done, particularly on dairy farms. What needs to be done to allow that important part of our economy to continue while, at the same time, respecting our borders and immigration law?



Senator James Risch

We need a rock solid guest worker program that allows workers from other countries to come into this country as guest workers to meet the needs of our industries. This is crucial to our state.

I meet regularly with businesses that need and employ guest workers to solve this problem and several solutions have been proposed but not passed. It is still a work in progress.

Did you vote for or against the 2013 legislation (passed the Senate 68-32, but not taken up in the House), the so-called “Gang of Eight” legislation on immigration reform? Briefly explain the reasoning behind your vote.

I voted no because I believe we could do better on the security provisions in the bill and add a workable guest worker program in the bill.

Do you agree with the statement that seeking asylum is not a crime and, if so, what is your response to President Trump’s decision to send troops to our southern border to prevent their entry if they get to the United States?

Those seeking asylum in our country must enter legally and respect our immigration laws. As a nation we have a right and a duty to protect our borders. I agree we must find humane solutions that honor the dignity of life and respect the rule of law.