



Preparing for Legalization: General Suggestions for Parishes

When immigration law changes to permit the estimated 11 million undocumented people in the United States to come out of the shadows to join our society, we want parishes to be able to compassionately and effectively meet the large increase in the demand for legalization services that will result.

What can you start doing now in your parish to prepare for this change in immigration law?

- Appoint someone or a group within your parish to be the coordinator for immigration legalization issues. This person can be responsible, among other things, for providing accurate information to your parishioners on immigration and legalization issues. Information available through the resource websites including the Georgia Catholic Conference website (<http://www.georgiacc.org/>), Catholic Legal Immigration Network (<http://cliniclegal.org/comprehensive-immigration-reform>), and Catholic Charities Atlanta (<http://www.catholiccharitiesatlanta.org/services/immigration-legal-services/>).
- Be aware that, to date, there is no change in federal immigration law. Therefore, there is no program yet for undocumented people to apply to legalize their status. You can use the attached flyer, “There is No New Immigration Law,” to provide local information for your community. This flyer also discusses who is authorized to provide immigration legal services.
- Be aware that there are many unscrupulous immigration consultants, sometimes called *notarios*, who seek to take advantage of unsuspecting immigrants. These individuals take immigrants’ money in exchange for preparing and filing “legalization” applications even though there is no legalization program to apply for.
- Your parish office is not authorized by law to provide legal services to immigrants. Often well-meaning but inexperienced parish workers try to help undocumented immigrants but instead inadvertently put the immigrant in deportation proceedings.

If and when legislation passes, Catholic Charities Atlanta Immigration Legal Services will offer two onsite presentations/training sessions at the Chancery building. CCA does not have the staff capacity to come directly to the parishes to offer individual training for your staff and volunteers, so they will videotape those sessions conducted at the Chancery and make them available on the CCA website for those that would like to show it in their own parish. Those sessions will include information to help parish staff to distinguish between providing public education to the community and providing legal advice to the community.

Additionally, the agency will put together several resource materials that will be available on the CCA website. Those resources that will be provided by CCA (if required under the new legislation) will include:

- Careful analysis of the law including practice pointers and law summaries
- referrals for GED

- referrals for tax issues
- referrals to resolve criminal legal issues.

All of these resources will be offered in English and Spanish.

Encourage Proactive steps:

Even before immigration reform is enacted, there are some proactive steps that can be encouraged, such as collection of paperwork that will be needed no matter what type of reform eventually passes. For example,

Official birth certificates from their place of birth.

Passport through the local consulate from one's native country.

Registration in parish and sacraments of initiation as proof of presence at least as of a certain date (in addition to spiritual benefits!)

Collecting and keeping all types of receipts that can prove that an individual has lived in the United States, such as rent receipts, utility bills, even grocery receipts!

Pay stubs or other evidence of work or income. Those who are paid in cash should keep records of what work they did, for whom they worked and what they were paid.

Documents showing income and other taxes paid.

(Revised 7/2013)