NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Legalization path for immigrants, while imperfect, will relieve many fears

Mario T. García | May. 13, 2013 NCR Today

The debate on the proposed immigration reform bill has now commenced in the Senate, with the Judiciary Committee discussing it [1].

This is a complicated bill with many aspects to it, and I?m not sure that I am personally comfortable with certain parts of it. I hope to discuss this further in subsequent blogs. What I want to address here is one essential element: the path to citizenship for some 11 million immigrants currently in the country without legal permission (not all Latinos, by the way).

Many, if not most, have been in the U.S. for many years and have been working productively in jobs most American citizens shun because they represent low-paying work. Plus, they now have the ?stigma? of being ?immigrant jobs.?

At the same time, these immigrants and their families live every day with the fear of being apprehended and deported. Indeed, the Obama administration has deported record numbers of immigrants without proper documentation for legal residence.

Recent reports of deportation rumors in California's Central Valley hit this point home. The rumor -- believed to have begun in Madera, Calif., according to the Associated Press [2], during the last three weeks -- said that immigration officials had undertaken widespread efforts to locate and deport immigrants without legal residency papers. It literally caused panic among these immigrants, many of whom contribute to the rich agricultural economy of the state.

The rumor quickly spread to the areas outside Madera, causing even more apprehension. Parents kept their kids out of school; they stopped going shopping, or going to work, and some even failed to keep medical appointments out of fear of being reported.

At one level, this fear and apprehension is regretful. At the same time, what impresses is the immigrant networking available as the result of cellphones, texting and emails that made it possible for them to communicate with each other and spread the warning. This communication also reached employers, public officials and immigration officials who quickly reacted by noting that the rumors were in fact false.

While the rumors now appear false, the deep concerns they caused were not.

To me, this incident raises the importance of legalizing the status of these immigrants who lived here, worked productively and contributed to American society. Their children go to school with our children, and many are either U.S. citizens or ?Dreamers? who have spent nearly all of their lives in this country.

While the legalization aspect of the immigration reform bill is not perfect (it is a temporary legalization that will require several years and fines before an undocumented immigrant can get a green card much less apply for

citizenship), still, it will remove this fear and apprehension witnessed in Madera and its surrounding community.

This temporary legalization will at least provide humane conditions for these immigrants to have a more stable and secure life.

As I have often noted in other blogs, test this belief by thinking to yourselves, *what would you desire if you were in a similar situation or your kids were in such conditions?*

Opponents of legalization call it another form of amnesty ? the A word ? and that it rewards people who have broken the law. But the response is that these immigrants are not criminals in the way that opponents want to categorize them, but human beings who have crossed a border without authorization, not to criminalize us, but to care for their families and to escape poverty and oppression.

We would do the same thing under similar conditions.

Moreover, as Catholics, we also know that an issue like immigration is not just a legal or economic issue but a moral issue, as well. Scripture and the church?s teaching instruct us to help one another, especially the poor and the oppressed. This is the Sermon on the Mount, and we are called to live out Jesus? words, not just selectively but in general.

To me, the saving grace of a complex immigration reform bill is that in a humane and Christian way we help our fellow human beings by relieving them of deep anxieties that no one should have to endure.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/05/2015 - 05:07*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/legalization-path-immigrants-while-imperfect-will-relieve-many-fears

Links:
[1] http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/298773-judiciary-adopts-six-amendments-to-tighten-border
[2] http://www.modbee.com/2013/05/10/2709922/immigrant-raid-rumor-fuels-fear.html