

**Statement from the Bishops of the State of Mississippi
on Immigration to the Governor Phil Bryant and the Mississippi State
Legislature**

January 21, 2012

As faith leaders, we express our deep concern about the growing climate of an anti-immigrant attitude developing in our communities and in the halls of State government. We are very distressed by efforts directed at passing legislation that threatens the dignity of the human person and the basic human rights that we accord to the dignity of the family unit.

We do not need to enact legislation that not only threatens the sacred dignity of the human person but, on a practical level, will place a greater obligation for enforcement by already stressed police personnel and a greater strain on already limited resources available for law enforcement.

We call upon our State legislators and Governor Bryant to refrain from drafting and enacting legislation that will adversely affect our local communities and businesses. Particularized local legislation will not remedy immigration policies and procedures that need to be corrected on a national level. Anti-immigration legislation will cause adversarial relationships between good people who are working side-by-side for the benefit of our communities.

Given our history, a troublesome past, with biases and discrimination between cultural and ethnic groups, we will suffer a major setback to the great progress that has been made. While we still have a long way to go in the development of better human relations, anti-immigrant legislation can only deter our progress on this journey.

The immigration debate has already ignited some feelings of deep resentment between racial and cultural groups in our communities. The issues in the immigration debate, separation of documented immigrants versus undocumented visitors or guest workers, provoke emotional responses that are, by their nature, divisive. We would do well to pause and reflect on the various dimensions of the immigration question before we craft legislation that will provoke anger, hostility, and resentment that causes confusion due to a lack of clarity. We should all bear in mind that any law aimed at disparaging particular people will have a significant negative impact on our Mississippi economy.

The United States is a nation built on a system of laws seeking justice for individuals and safeguarding the basic human rights of individual persons. We know that societies crumble when laws are ignored and broken, but if a law violates human rights and human dignity, it cannot be considered a just law.

While we do not deny the legitimacy of concern for laws that are broken and for any behavior that threatens our national security, we, however, do not consider the search for employment, decent housing, and secure family units to be a threat to our society or our security.

Coarse anti-immigrant legislation eats away at the very core of our nation's ideals and unjust punitive measures diminish the character of all of us and we are not a people in pursuit of justice. For our part, in exercising our responsibility as leaders of Christian communities, we call for adherence to basic Gospel mandates of love, care and concern for our neighbors.

We urge our people to be followers of Jesus Christ who by example taught us to show love of God through love of our brothers and sisters.



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