

Arizona Institute for Public Life

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What is the Truth about Proposition 200?

Proposition 200: Reflection on *Ecclesia in America*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

Arizona's economy, culture, and even popular piety and worship practices, are influenced by immigration. Hardly exclusive to our state or times, Our Holy Father calls immigration in this continent's history a "constant feature... from the beginning of evangelization to our own day" (*Ecclesia in America*, 17). It presents challenges which we have seen our federal immigration system is unable to meet. Every day, thousands of families make our lives easier and more affordable by cooking in our restaurants, cleaning and maintaining our offices and resorts, landscaping our parks, building our homes and growing our food. Their hard work and contributions most often go unnoticed. They tolerate substandard housing with inadequate nourishment, health care, and education for their children. And yet they continue to risk their lives to get here. Clearly we need better, not more harmful and divisive, laws in our state.

As Christians, it is our duty to ensure that the globalization and migration of labor "brings some positive consequences, such as efficiency and increased production and which... can help to bring greater unity among peoples and make possible a better service to the human family. However, if globalization is ruled merely by the laws of the market applied to suit the powerful, the consequences cannot but be negative" (*Ecclesia*, 20).

As we must protect our borders, so must other countries take responsibility for the welfare of their citizens, providing them opportunities to live a decent life in their country of birth. However, our bishops agree that "when persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive" (*Strangers No Longer*, 35).

The chief sponsor of Proposition 200, Protect Arizona Now (PAN), argues that illegal immigration is "an invasion" and "the destruction of America as we know it." Their proposition does nothing to further the economy, security or unity of this state. Although voting is already illegal for non-citizens and there is no proof of material voter fraud, it aims to impose more restrictions at the polls at a time when Arizona's voting rate is the sixth lowest in the country. It would also require state, city and county workers, and any others distributing public benefits, to cooperate with immigration authorities by verifying citizenship of applicants and reporting violations in writing. Failure to file such reports would result in criminal charges.

This initiative clearly goes against *Ecclesia*, in which Pope John Paul II states that social action "is a question not only of alleviating the most serious and urgent needs through individual actions here and there, but of uncovering the roots of evil and proposing initiatives to make social, political and economic structures more just and fraternal" (*Ecclesia*, 18). The proponents of Proposition 200 are using the citizen initiative process to harden the hearts, not improve the laws, of Arizona.

While there are no simple solutions to this complex problem, it may help to reflect on Jesus' answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" (*Lk* 10:29). Rather than narrowly defining "neighbor," Jesus' response, as our Holy Father explains, "demands of each individual an attitude of respect for the dignity of others and of real concern for them, even if they are strangers or enemies" (*Ecclesia*, 57). What does this demand mean for us? Recognizing that there are immigrants among us and that many will continue to come, we, as Church, are called "to help them settle in their new land and to foster a welcoming attitude among the local population, in the belief that a mutual openness will bring enrichment to all" (*Ecclesia*, 65). Fostering a welcoming attitude means we cannot remain idle. It means we must speak out on behalf of those without a voice and against any divisive rhetoric. It means we must vote against propositions harmful to our families and neighbors, and ultimately, contrary to our faith.

"The Church in America must be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction of the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another. Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration" (*Ecclesia*, 65).

"By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"
— *Jn* 13:35