

Food for Thought

Back in 1621, helpful locals gathered with immigrants who had fled religious persecution to organize a great harvest feast that has evolved into our modern Thanksgiving holiday. Food is on our minds this time of year, and justice should be too. Here are two ways to show our thanks for God's blessings by taking action on behalf of God's children.

WHO PICKED THOSE APPLES?

Each year, thousands of immigrant farmworkers milk cows and harvest fresh fruits and vegetables on farms across our diocese. Most do not have "work papers" because our current immigration system makes it virtually impossible for people from poor countries, who don't have advanced degrees, to obtain visas. They are vulnerable to wage theft because they don't know their rights or won't speak up out of fear. They can be deported and ripped from their families at any time.

Our farmworker neighbors are among the millions of people in desperate need of comprehensive immigration reform. Recently Cardinal Timothy Dolan, on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote a letter to House Speaker John Boehner, asking that the House of Representatives address the issue of immigration reform "**as soon as possible.**"

He went on to say, "*As pastors, we witness each day the human consequences of a broken immigration system. Families are separated through deportation, migrant workers are exploited in the workplace, and migrants die in the desert. ...*

*[O]ur nation cannot continue to receive the benefits of the work and contributions of undocumented immigrants without extending to them the protection of the law. ... Keeping these human beings as a permanent underclass of workers who are unable to assert their rights or enjoy the fruits of their labor is a **stain on the soul of the nation.**"*

In particular our Bishops and many other advocates continue to insist that legislation on immigration should include a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. Becoming a U.S. citizen would still be a demanding process that many years. Appli-

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GETTING HUNGRIER IN AMERICA

In September, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would cut \$40 billion from "SNAP" benefits (food stamps) over the next 10 years. SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, provides support for **47 million people** to purchase food.

Three-quarters of the households receiving SNAP include at least one child, elderly person or disabled person.

Almost half of the people who receive SNAP are under the age of 18.

To be eligible for SNAP, a household's gross income has to be 130% or less of the federal poverty level. That translates to \$14,936/year for a household of one, \$30,615/year for a household of four. That is real economic hardship. (Undocumented immigrants are ineligible, and in NY State immigrants with green cards aren't eligible until they've worked in the U.S. for at least 10 years.)

The bill passed by the House would also require able-bodied adult SNAP beneficiaries without chil-

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(Immigration Reform continued)

cants would have to learn English and pass a test on U.S. history and government.

Just giving people “legal” status without any way to become citizens would leave them in second-class status, an “underclass”, as Cardinal Dolan wrote, with uncertain rights. This is not the solution to this human problem.

The Senate has passed legislation that would make many of the changes to our immigration system that the Church has long advocated. Time is running out for the House of Representatives to address this issue.

As the Church, the Body of Christ, we have to make our voices heard for our sisters and brothers who don't have a voice.

In thanksgiving for the bounty you enjoy due to the labor of immigrant farmworkers' labor, take these action steps:

*Call your Representative to express your support for quick action on comprehensive immigration reform that **includes a path to citizenship**. Dial the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your Representative's office. If you aren't sure who that is, you can ask the switchboard operator to look it up or you can check at this web site <http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>

*Even if you've already called your Representative earlier this year, call again!

*Gather signatures at your parish in support of immigration reform. Contact the Justice & Peace staffer from your county for a postcard template. You'll find the phone number in the box below.

*Then drop those postcards off at your Representative's home office, and do it soon!

(SNAP benefits continued)

dren to find a job or enroll in a work training program. Encouraging people to become more financially self sufficient is a positive thing.

However, Catholic Charities staff around the diocese and around the country could point out something missing in the politicians' rhetoric. Since the 2008 financial crash, huge numbers of people who have never asked for assistance in their lives have come into Catholic Charities offices, shell-shocked that they have to ask for help; they do so exactly because they have lost their jobs or had their hours reduced. They *want* to work, whether or not they have children. They *are* looking for work. To infer that adults on SNAP need simply to “go get a job” is an unfair accusation to toss at people whose livelihoods have been devastated by the Great Recession and who have been seeking employment for months.

The Senate has also passed substantial cuts to SNAP, totaling \$3.9 billion over the next 10 years. While that is considerably less than the House version, it would still affect millions of people.

Because the proposed SNAP cuts would leave so many vulnerable people without access to sufficient food, Catholic Charities USA and many other faith-based and humanitarian organizations have been standing up against those cuts.

Members of the House and Senate have begun negotiations on this issue, so now is the time to let them know that they shouldn't try balance the federal budget on the backs of the poor.

Before sitting down to your Thanksgiving feast, think about what it would mean to try to feed yourself on \$4 to \$6 per day, which is about the average SNAP benefit per person in New York State.

Then use that Capitol switchboard number to call Senators Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand and your Representative and tell them your opinion on reducing SNAP benefits for low income Americans.

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