

Guest workers a first step

Having written two columns about immigration, I realize that this is a hot-button topic. I have received more letters and e-mails on this than on any other topic.

In September 2003 I wrote about our society's schizophrenia on the issue of illegal workers. We employ them in large numbers, but we say we don't want them. This puts both illegal employees and employers in an impossible situation.

In October 2003 I ventured four suggestions on what might be done about the problem of illegal migrant workers. My first recommendation was for a "guest-worker" visa program to legalize the status of undocumented workers. This would allow millions of illegal workers to regularize their status in the United States and would allow employers to bring people here to work for an extended length of time.

In January 2004 President Bush, accepting economic and geographic reality, proposed a guest-worker program. This shows that the idea is in the wind.

Economically the reality is that there are about 7 million illegal immigrants in the United States. If they all were sent home tomorrow, some industries here would come to a halt.

Geographically the reality is that most of the illegal workers come from Mexico. Our southern border is too long and too easily crossed to effectively seal it. As long as there is grinding poverty



Father Peter Daly
Parish Diary

there and jobs here, people will migrate.

Under President Bush's program, guest workers could get a three-year visa if they have employment lined up before they come. If they are already here, workers could get a visa if they are employed and pay a fine. These visas could be renewed for a second three-year term. After that workers are supposed to go home, though it is anybody's guess how this could be enforced. Employers are permitted to bring in guest workers if they show that American workers could not be found.

The president's plan solves some problems. It gives legal status to workers from Mexico. It makes them taxpayers and Social Security participants. It allows law enforcement to concentrate on real criminals at the border (like drug smugglers). It might end the illegal traffic in human beings. It would allow migrants to go home for visits. (Some of my parishioners have not been able to go home for funerals of parents.)

But the president's idea does not address the reason

people want to leave Mexico and come here: poverty.

We need to do what the European Union did for its poor neighbors. We need a 20-year economic development program to build infrastructure and raise wages and living standards in Mexico. Then there would be less pressure to come here. A more prosperous Mexico is in our self-interest.

President Bush promotes globalization of the economy. But we need to "globalize" in ways conservatives never consider, especially in regard to fair-labor standards.

Every free-trade agreement should have basic labor standards including a right to organize workers freely and to bargain collectively. Unions should be allowed to organize across borders so that employers could not move jobs from Michigan to Monterey to exploit vulnerable workers. There should also be a global push for a living wage.

If countries want to sell products in the United States, they should have fair-labor standards to put all workers on a more level playing field.

President Bush's guest-worker proposal is a good first step. But it chiefly answers the demands of large employers here for cheap labor. It does not address the long-term causes of this migration.

Father Peter J. Daly is a columnist for Catholic News Service.

Guest-worker proposals need change

To the editor:

Living conditions in many Third World countries are why migrant farm workers illegally want to work here and also send money home to support their families.

With manufacturing jobs going to countries like China and Mexico and office work going to countries like India, farm work will become work we will need to do to survive.

A guest worker law with reasonable worker rights is needed to allow guest farm workers to come to our country without their families to work only during the growing and harvesting seasons and then return back to their native countries. There is no need to provide additional citizenship opportunities or amnesty opportunities for guest farm workers except for the existing legal quota system. Legal guest farm workers should be able together to obtain better working conditions compared to illegal alien farm workers. American citizens should have the first opportunity to do farm work over foreign workers. Guest workers should also be required to have their own medical insurance.

Our constitution states that government is to protect our borders from illegal aliens. We have about 4 percent of the world's popula-

tion and about 50 percent of the world's immigration. About 700,000 illegal aliens enter our country every year and this is hampering our country's opportunity to approach a desirable 0-percent population growth. Environmental problems are escalating from this population growth. There is a lack of deportation of illegal aliens. Employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens need to be legally punished.

The Diocese of Rochester is promoting a petition drive on February 6 and 7 at their churches which is not totally in the best interests of our country for guest farm workers especially in promoting unfair unnecessary citizenship in our country from select countries. I urge that the petitions not be signed until necessary corrections are done.

John D. Brankacz
Deer Meadow Run
Macedon

Likes varied viewpoints about issues

To the editor:

I am reminded of Shakespeare's play "Much Ado About Nothing" in all the dialogue and labeling of today's world — conservative, liberal; posture of parishioners in Mass.

I too have missed Father McBrien's articles. In the same way that a coin has two sides, I like to listen to more than one side of an issue — it broadens by horizon.

In Rochester we are blessed with interfaith cooperation and interaction. We can thank Bishop Clark, the late-Rabbi Judea Miller, and Dr. Muhammad Shafiq for this today along with such organizations as Women's Interfaith Coalition.

On page 5 of the Jan. 29 *Catholic Courier* the headline is "Christians, Jews continue monthly interfaith talks." Bravo!!

I thank God for my wise mother's counsel: "If God didn't want me to think, He shouldn't have given me a

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