



Catholic IMMact Parish-based Immigrant Justice Committee Planning Guide

The Catholic Immigrant Prophetic Action Project (Catholic IMMact) is an initiative of the Hope Border Institute (HOPE) and the Center for Migration Studies of New York (CMS) designed to assist the Catholic Church in the United States in organizing a robust response with and for immigrants and refugees living in daily fear of family separation and deportation. Catholic IMMact offers organizing, communications, and research support to (arch)dioceses in their mission to preach the Gospel and to walk prophetically with immigrants towards a more just and humane future.

Why Form Parish-Based Immigrant Justice Committees?

Parish-based immigrant justice committees are a key component of any diocesan Plan of Action. Throughout the United States, parish-based committees are playing prophetic roles in protecting and supporting their immigrant co-parishioners and immigrant community members in this time of indiscriminate mass deportation.

Parish immigrant justice committees are also important resources for educating parishioners and the broader Catholic community on Catholic social teaching on migration, including just and ethical immigration enforcement.

In addition, the grassroots advocacy conducted by parish immigrant justice committees will be essential to ending mass deportations and advancing just and humane immigration policy reform.

Finally, parish-based immigrant justice committees build community within the parish and provide faithful Catholics a meaningful way to live their faith and proclaim Gospel values.

Below we offer suggestions, based on best practices¹ on how to organize an immigrant justice committee within a parish and how the committee can assist immigrants and educate fellow parishioners on immigration issues. For questions or assistance, contact info@catholicimmpact.org

I. Initial Organizational Tasks

- **Pastor identifies a parishioner with knowledge of and/or concern about immigrant justice issues and asks the parishioner to chair an immigrant justice committee.** If the parish is a shared-parish², ideally this person will have relationships that connect the immigrant and native-born communities within the parish. In some cases, a parishioner may need to meet with their pastor, call attention to the need to form an immigrant justice committee, and offer to chair it.
- **Chairperson and pastor convene an organizing meeting of parishioners interested in forming an immigrant justice committee (or another name that makes sense in the parish context).** Announcements for the meeting should be made at all Masses and included in the parish bulletin. Ideally, impacted immigrant members of the parish or local community will be encouraged to attend, and the meeting should be fully bilingual. See [Implementing a Justice for Immigrants Campaign in the Parish](#) for more information on the organizational tasks required to form a parish-based Immigrant Justice Committee.

¹See [Implementing a Justice for Immigrants Campaign in the Parish](#) by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Justice for Immigrants, [Catholic Action Toolkit: Welcoming Migrants and Refugees](#) by Jesuit Refugee Services USA, and [Missionaries of Hope Toolkit](#) by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Justice for Immigrants, Jesuit Refugee Service USA, and Hope Border Institute.

² USCCB defines "shared parishes" as parish communities in which two or more languages or cultural contexts are present in the ministerial life of a parish (see [Best Practices for Shared Parishes](#)).

II. Self-Education Tasks for Immigrant Justice Committee Members

- **Study the Church's teachings on migration.** This could include reviewing [Catholic Social Teaching on Migration](#), [Pope Francis' February 2025 letter to U.S. Bishops](#), [Pope Leo XIV Address to Participants in the Meeting "Refugees & Migrants In Our Common Home,"](#) [USCCB November 2025 Special Message on Migration](#), [Archbishop Brenden Cahill's February 2026 Statement on Family Detention Centers](#), and [Border Bishops February 2026 Recommended Reforms to Immigration Enforcement](#).
- **Stay abreast of immigration policy developments and what other dioceses and parishes are doing** to end indiscriminate mass deportation by subscribing to Catholic immigration updates. Examples include [CMS's Migration Update](#), CLINIC's [Topline Immigration Policy Updates newsletter](#), and Catholic IMMpact policy updates (email info@catholicimmimpact.org).
- **Gain a basic understanding** of why nearly 13 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States today have no pathway to citizenship because of our country's outdated and unjust immigration laws (see [American Immigration Lawyers Fact Sheet](#).)
- **Learn what local immigrant service agencies and immigrant justice groups are doing in your community.** Set up meetings or interviews with leaders of these organizations and keep a running list of the organizations and the services they provide.
- Perhaps, most importantly, **meet with immigrant leaders within your parish, another nearby parish, or the broader community** to learn about their hopes and fears during these dark days and how the parish could assist in meeting their needs. Invite them to join the parish's immigrant justice committee.

III. Possible Areas of Focus for a Parish Immigrant Justice Committee

Tens of thousands of immigrants are living daily in fear of being separated from their children and deported to countries many do not know. It is critical that parish-based immigrant justice committees respond to this reality in timely and prophetic ways. Actions taken by other parish-based immigrant justice committees fall into five broad categories:

- **Protection:** *What can the parish do to keep their immigrant members safe?*

Possible actions could include:

- Developing a parish [Safety Plan](#) for times when Spanish-language Mass or other activities draw large numbers of immigrants to the parish.
- Providing up-to-date *Know Your Rights* Trainings for immigrant members. These could be offered by respected local immigration attorneys, immigrant rights groups, or local law schools. Provide Know Your Rights materials in appropriate languages at the back of your church.
- Offering *Power of Attorney workshops* where volunteer notaries can notarize documents allowing trusted adults the power of attorney if parents are suddenly detained.
- Providing contact information for local immigration attorneys recommended by local immigrant rights groups.
- If ICE/CBP is conducting immigration enforcement activities in the community, organizing a transportation team to take immigrant children to school or parishioners to work.
- Encouraging committee members to attend trainings on **monitoring and documenting immigration enforcement activities** in the community.

- **Support:** *What can the parish do to support its immigrant members threatened by deportation?*

Possible actions could include:

- Raising funds to help cover the legal fees of immigrant parishioners.
- Providing updated lists of community resources (in immigrants' first languages), including food banks and low-cost medical care.
- If ICE/CBP is conducting immigration enforcement activities in the community, organizing parish food drives and delivering groceries to immigrant co-parishioners' homes or helping transport children to school. Parishes may also partner with larger organizations providing these services.
- Accompanying immigrants to immigration court hearings or ICE appointments.

- **Educate and Build Support Among Catholics:** *What can the parish do to educate parishioners and other Catholics on the Church's teachings on migration and how inhumane immigration policies harm children, families, and communities?*

Several pastorally grounded programs offer prayerful opportunities to reflect on these issues, including *Who Is My Neighbor* from Catholic Charities of Wyoming (email kcassady@ccwy.org), [Faith and Immigration Justice](#) from JustFaith Ministries, and the *Catholic Teach-in on Migration* (email sweishar@loyno.edu).

- **Advocacy:** *What can the parish do to influence elected leaders and local law enforcement on immigration policies?*

Parishioners can schedule Zoom or in-person [meetings with members of Congress](#) or their staff to express support for immigration reform and an end to mass deportations. The immigrant justice committee can also request meetings with local sheriffs or police chiefs to emphasize the importance of local law enforcement not participating in immigration enforcement actions. [Letters to the Editor](#) written by the pastor and/or parishioners remain a powerful way to reach local residents and are often read by elected officials.

- **Public Witness:** *What can the parish do to visibly demonstrate solidarity with migrants, their families, and their communities?*

Changing hearts and minds on immigration requires visible witness. In these frightening times, it is critical that elected leaders and the broader community see the deep commitment of people of faith to humane immigration policies. Hope Border Institute, USCCB, and JRS have developed a helpful [toolkit](#) for organizing public vigils and marches.

Biblical times demand prophetic action. The Catholic IMMPact Project stands ready to support dioceses and their parish-based immigrant justice committees in meeting this moment. For more information, contact info@catholicimmpact.org.