

Recognizing Jesus in Distressing Disguise:  
The Christian Calling to Welcome the  
Illegal Immigrants in Our Midst

A Position Paper of  
The New America Consulting Group  
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**Introduction**

A ballot initiative that may still be facing Colorado voters would amend the state constitution by denying all "non-emergency" government services, other than those mandated by federal law, to illegal, or unauthorized, immigrants. This initiative, sponsored by a group with the polarizing name "Defend Colorado Now," has the backing of former Governor Dick Lamm and Congressman Tom Tancredo, both of whom have long been identified with extreme anti-immigrant positions.

Now, Governor Owens has called the Legislature back into session to deal with this "political side show" I find it interesting that for seven plus years as Governor this issue was not a priority for the Governor or the Legislature. Now they are doing backflips to see who is tougher on this issue! In an attempt to win the November elections, both Republicans and Democrats are showing their willingness to do irreparable damage to the State by passing laws that are at best foolish and shortsighted. The litigation brought on by this legislation will be a bonanza for the legal profession as we sue each other to enforce laws that were created for political reasons. "Activist judges" on both sides of the issue will have to clean up the legislative mess created by a lame duck Governor and weak legislature!

Any thoughtful consideration of this Legislation or initiative must begin from the undeniable fact that the initiative's passage into law would accomplish next to nothing. Will the initiative's provisions bar illegal immigrants from receiving food stamps or welfare benefits? No; they are not receiving these benefits at present. Will the new laws prevent illegal immigrants from receiving emergency medical care, police protection, or education in the public schools? Once again, the answer is no, because these services are required by federal law. The official website for "Defend Colorado Now" does not provide even the roughest of estimates as to how much the state's taxpayers would save if the initiative were passed. The measure's proponents, when pressed by reporters from the editorially conservative *Rocky*

*Mountain News*, were "unable to say what services illegal immigrants are now receiving that would stop if the initiative passed in November" (*Rocky Mountain News*, 5 January 2006, 18A).

Most Coloradans readily recognize that the current immigration system is not working adequately. The number of illegal immigrants in our state has increased significantly over the past decade and this increase cannot continue indefinitely without causing serious social problems. The current unsettled situation along the U.S. border with Mexico raises valid national security concerns, and creates grave humanitarian problems for those seeking to cross the border. But the anti-immigrant initiative being proposed in our state does not move us forward in addressing these important concerns. Instead, passage of the initiative would be far likelier to stir up racial and ethnic divisions than provide any answers to the complex problem of illegal immigration.

An informed debate about the presence of a significant number of illegal immigrants in our state will only begin once the voters have considered this issue in all of its dimensions, and not simply in its economic repercussions, as the proponents of the current initiative have mistakenly done. As we are not talking about commodities, such as oil or grain, but about our fellow human beings, the debate about illegal immigration does not only involve economic considerations: it includes social justice, legal and political, and spiritual and religious aspects, as well. Let us now consider these wider dimensions of the debate, beginning with the economic factors.

### **Economic Aspects**

Those who support the proposed initiative argue that illegal immigration is harmful to Colorado for two major reasons: first, because the illegal immigrants impose added costs on government services that are already being stretched too far, and second, because the illegal immigrants are taking good jobs away from American citizens. But these arguments do not hold up to close examination.

Let us start with the fact that there are approximately 225,000 illegal immigrants residing in Colorado at present (Jeffrey S. Passel, *Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics*, 14). (This amounts to only one out of every twenty Coloradans, by the way, clearly demonstrating the inaccuracy of heated rhetoric about an "invasion" of illegal immigrants.) Given that members of this group have an annual per capita income of \$12,000 (Passel,

*Unauthorized Immigrants*, 30), that means that illegal immigrants in Colorado earn about \$2.7 billion each year. Assuming that 20 percent of these earnings are remitted to relatives in their home countries, this would still mean that illegal immigrants contribute \$2.16 billion to our state's economy each year.

Common sense alone tells us that these immigrants are a boon to our state's economy. All of these people need places to stay, so they are paying rent right now in thousands of apartment complexes, and many are making mortgage payments on homes. These Colorado residents need to buy groceries, or take lunch breaks at restaurants. They need to buy clothing, furniture, and essential household items. They enjoy entertainment in their free time, so they buy TVs, radios, go to the movies, and attend sporting events. Illegal immigrants need to get from home to their places of work, just like U.S. citizens do, so they need to buy cars, or utilize public transit systems. Of course, this population imposes some costs, in areas such as schooling and emergency medical care, which run into tens of millions of dollars each year, but these costs to the state's economy are far outweighed by the benefits that these Coloradans provide. If these 225,000 people were suddenly to leave our state and take their purchasing power with them, thousands of businesses in our state would be adversely affected. Sales tax and property tax revenues would decline. (And for Coloradans, what would this do to the TABOR law requirements?) We are already feeling the results of these anti-immigrant discussions. We have the highest foreclosure rate in the Country. Many of the immigrants who own homes in Colorado are simply walking away from their jobs, homes, auto loans, and moving to states that are more immigrant-friendly.

The proponents of the anti-immigrant initiative also claim that illegal immigrants take well-paying jobs away from U.S. citizens. However, most scholarly studies have found that illegal immigrants tend to fill positions that many U.S. citizens do not care to have, for one reason or another. Twenty-six percent of groundskeepers are illegal immigrants, as are 21 percent of roofers, 22 percent of household help, 24 percent of dishwashers, 20 percent of unskilled construction laborers, and 23 percent of agricultural workers (Passel, *Unauthorized Immigrants*, 27). Many of these jobs are not well regarded by American workers, so it is naive to expect that if these positions were suddenly vacated, they would all be filled by U.S. citizens.

Once again, let us use common sense to understand how illegal immigrants are key players in two of Colorado's most important

economic sectors, the tourism industry and the construction industry. If we estimate that about 25,000 immigrants work in tourist-related enterprises, and 24,000 in the construction field (Passel, *Unauthorized Immigrants*, 4, 14, 26), what would happen if all of these jobs, or even half of them, were suddenly vacated? In most cases, these positions would remain unfilled, and hundreds of businesses would have to scale back or shut down. Imagine the Ski industry without these workers. I am sure the legislature will want some kind of guest worker program for this industry so we can continue to ski and enjoy the blessings of living in Colorado. I pray that we will not allow this kind of slave labor in our state in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ripple effect would spread throughout the entire state economy. The price of dinner at a restaurant that would lose its illegal employees might rise from twelve dollars to sixteen dollars due to increased labor costs; the cost of a new house that would have cost \$175,000 might rise to \$225,000. The very wealthy would take these increased costs in their stride; the big losers would be Coloradans in the middle class and in the working class.

The grim reality is that all of us, whether we support the anti-immigrant initiative or oppose it, indirectly benefit from the cheap labor that illegal immigrant workers contribute to our states economy. Given that the per capita income for illegal immigrants is only \$12,000 a year, while for U.S. citizens that figure is \$24,300 a year (Passel, *Unauthorized Migrants*, 30), it is unrealistic to believe that most American citizens would gladly embrace all of the jobs now held by illegal immigrants in Colorado if those jobs became open. And if that did happen, labor costs would rise so much that our state's economic growth would be negatively affected. Don't you find it interesting that the same people who oppose raising the minimum wage by a couple of dollars think that employers will pay double the wage rate to hire U.S. citizens? According to their argument, a raise in minimum wage will force employers to cut back on the number of employees and this will have a devastating impact on our economy.

### **Social Justice Aspects**

While the majority of illegal immigrants to the United States come from Mexico, a significant number of illegal persons travel to our country from Central America, Asia, and Africa. People from these areas may make up as much as 40 percent of the number of illegal immigrants in Colorado, which would translate to about 90,000 individuals (Passel, *Unauthorized Migrants*, 4, 14). Many Central Americans have fled here from nations still recovering from decades of civil war, where government corruption is rampant

and political disputes often end in violence. Quite a few people cannot return to their native countries for fear of being put to death or dealt with harshly. Numerous illegal immigrants from Asia have fled repressive governments or religious and ethnic persecution. Much of Africa remains mired in desperate poverty, with long-suffering populations ruled over by vicious dictatorial regimes with no concern for their citizens. Many of the people who fled these dire conditions lacked the time or money or opportunity to emigrate legally. Certainly, it would not be prudent for our nation to welcome every single person who desires to come to America, but how can we turn our backs on persons for whom staying here is a matter of life and death?

We also must recognize that many immigrants come to this country to be reunited with family members. Of the 1,063,000 immigrants who were legally admitted to the United States in 2002, 673,000, or 63 percent, were close relatives of U.S. citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 9). Even if the rate of family reunification among illegal immigrants is only half of this rate, that would still mean that 71,100 of Colorado's illegal immigrants came here to be reunited with family members. How can we justify breaking families apart, in a country that prides itself on its cultivation of "family values"?

We must also keep in mind, when we speak of illegal immigrants, that we are dealing, for the most part, with families. The common belief that most illegal immigrants are single men is untrue. Of the 10.3 million illegal immigrants in this country, only about 3 million are single men or women. Thus, 71 percent of these people are living in family groups, which include 4.7 million children (persons under the age of 18) (Passel, *Unauthorized Migrants*, 18). Thus, any action that Colorado voters would take against illegal immigrants, any greater stigma that we would place on them, would be borne by a significant number of children. Even if we concede that the parents in these families were wrong to violate U.S. immigration laws, how does it serve justice to persecute these children, who are surely innocent?

Lastly, Americans have traditionally valued fairness, and so we should all be offended by the fact that our immigration laws are not being enforced fairly. In 2000, while 1.9 percent of illegal immigrants from Mexico were removed from our country, only 0.2 percent of Filipinos of the same status were deported. For people from India, Korea, and China, the respective figures were 0.5 percent, 0.3 percent, and 0.4 percent. In that same year, the rate of deportation for Mexican illegal immigrants was four and a half times what it was for illegal immigrants from Canada and

Europe (Immigration and Naturalization Service, *2000 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 23-26). One can only conclude from these numbers that some type of "racial profiling" is in operation, for the vast discrepancy in these deportation rates cannot be due solely to chance. And if this profiling of people "who look like Mexicans" is going on, how can immigration officials readily distinguish between Mexicans who are here illegally, Mexicans or other Latinos who are naturalized citizens, and Mexicans or other Latinos who were born here or whose families have lived here for generations? Condoning one form of bigotry invariably leads to the condoning of other forms, and so all Americans, not just those of Mexican ancestry, should be concerned about these disturbing policies.

### **Legal and Political Aspects**

The advocates of the anti-immigrant initiative claim to be in favor of law and order, but they fail to recognize that their proposed measure unfairly lumps all "illegal" immigrants into the same category. In fact, about 12 percent of illegal immigrants have made themselves known to the appropriate government agencies and are in some way working through the present system (Passel, *Unauthorized Migrants*, 9). In Colorado, that would mean that about 27,000 illegal immigrants would like the benefits of citizenship for themselves and their family members and are patiently complying with the existing immigration laws. The proposed initiative would not recognize these good faith efforts, and that is patently unfair.

The backers of the initiative speak of illegal immigrants in sweeping terms as people who are not U.S. citizens. They do not realize that 31 percent of illegal immigrant families contain children who are American citizens. In fact, nationally, there are 3.1 million children of illegal immigrants who are U.S. citizens by virtue of their having been born in this country. These children outnumber their non-citizen siblings by two to one (Passel, *Unauthorized Migrants*, 18-19). In their rush to punish illegal immigrants, anti-immigrant groups have given no thought as to how their campaign might negatively impact these American citizens, of whom there might be as many as 67,000 in Colorado. If laws are passed harming illegal immigrant parents, how will their children *who are full citizens and entitled to all the rights and privileges of citizens* be spared from being harmed, too? To interfere with the rights of these young U.S. citizens would be unfair and would fly in the face of the traditional American principle that all citizens, whether native-born or naturalized, are equal under the law.

The anti-immigrant interest groups have also cited concerns about national security as a justification for punitive measures against illegal immigrants. But these groups have not mentioned the fact that no national security experts have argued that greater immigration restrictions would have prevented the terrorist attacks of September 11 (National Immigration Forum, "Top 10 Immigration Myths and Facts," 2). We also need to keep in mind that 13 of the 19 hijackers had entered the United States legally (Jorge Ramos, *The Latino Wave*, 43). Most illegal immigrants come to Colorado to work and to build a better life for their children, not to harm American citizens. Certainly, there are many people in the world who wish us harm, but few of them come here to mow our lawns, clean our houses, or wash dishes at our favorite neighborhood cafes.

### **Spiritual and Religious Aspects**

The issue of illegal immigration has been hotly debated over the past several years, but the Christian churches, for the most part, have not been very vocal about this issue. Perhaps that is because many sincere believers feel that political questions have little or no connection with religious principles. But as Jesus himself admonished us, if we would be his disciples, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). An authentic faith commitment means that every part of our lives belongs to God, whether we are at home, at work, or at play. We certainly have no good reason to believe that we must deny or ignore our faith commitments whenever we enter a voting booth!

Devout Christians have a long and noble history of working for positive social change in the United States. Many of our nation's Founding Fathers saw their struggle against the tyranny of the British Crown as rooted in biblical notions of liberty. The Abolitionist movement of the mid-nineteenth century, key elements of the Progressive Movement of the early 1900s, and more recently, the Civil Rights Movement, all had numerous leaders who lived out their Christian faith by working for social change and political transformation.

The Old Testament contains numerous exhortations from God to His People, Israel, demanding, and not simply asking, that the outsiders in their midst be treated with justice, dignity, and compassion. God tells the Prophet Jeremiah to instruct Israel, "Act with justice and righteousness... and do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow" (Jeremiah

22:3). The Prophet Zechariah proclaimed, in a similar vein, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another" (Zechariah 7:9-10) God made it clear that He had a special love for the aliens, or strangers, of those ancient times, for those persons were so often vulnerable and powerless. They did not belong to the Chosen People, possessed little wealth or political power, had low social standing, and were looked down upon by the religious authorities of the day. God surely commanded the prophets to speak up for them, for God knew that no one else would do so.

In our post-9/11 political climate, in which so many voices are urging Americans to hate or at least fear all "foreigners," is it not clear that the so-called "illegal aliens" of the present day are the spiritual heirs of the "aliens" who were so badly treated in ancient Israel? But in those times, courageous people of faith, like Jeremiah and Zechariah, stood up for the rights of the aliens, knowing that such stands would be unpopular and would upset or anger "the powers that be." Where are the heirs of those prophets today?

Jesus Christ embraced wholeheartedly the words of the prophets that called for a special love for the most powerless in any society. In the very first public statement of his ministry on earth, Jesus proclaimed: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor..." (Luke 4:18). Surely, Jesus would look upon the illegal immigrants in Colorado as among those "poor" to whom he has brought "good news." If those of us who call ourselves Christians do not heed this unmistakable call of Jesus, and treat these strangers in our midst with love, then who will?

Of course, to live out our Gospel calling is not easy, and it involves taking risks. To treat illegal immigrants as our brothers and sisters, and not as strangers or enemies from whom we must "Defend Colorado Now," may very well make us unpopular or lead others to accuse us of "breaking the law." Yet a great number of Christians oppose abortion, despite the fact that our government has legalized it, and would argue, "Sometimes God's law takes precedence over man's law." If we are living out our faith consistently, and not selectively, should this logic not also apply in the case of illegal immigrants? Where is the voice of the Evangelical Community on this issue? Could it be that following Jesus has taken a back seat to the politics of the day?

How powerful it would be if we could look upon the influx of immigrants from Mexico and Central America into Colorado not as a problem but as an opportunity, and what an impact it would create! Perhaps what our state's churches need today is the spirit of the Apostle Paul, who preached to the people of Athens that from one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and He allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for Him and find Him (Acts 17:26-27). If only we could live out Paul's teaching that all people are brothers and sisters, and that just as we have gifts to share with our neighbors from the South, they have gifts to share with us!

Although one hears little news of it in the corridors of power and in the mainstream media, there is a great religious revival going on all across America. In nearly ever corner of the land, Latino immigrants are replenishing parishes that were once all but abandoned, re-energizing dying churches, and forming their own congregations at an astonishing rate. Surely, the Holy Spirit is at work in this great revival, and grace is all around, for those who have the eyes to see. Those Christian communities that have welcomed Latino immigrants realize that they have been blessed with wonderful opportunities to grow in new ways. They have found that most Latinos - illegal or legal immigrants or native-born - have strong family values, a profound respect for history and tradition, and are eager to take part in worship and deepen their own prayer lives. Let us now examine these gifts in more detail.

### ***Family***

For most immigrants and certainly for Latinos, the family, *la familia*, is of primary importance. Family ties are more important than anything else, even more than acquiring wealth or gaining greater social status. Latinos have an Old Testament-inspired view of children, seeing them as blessings from God, and the prevailing attitude is, "The more children the better." Welcoming more children into the family even when it causes the family's standard of living to decline is not regarded as foolish, as most Latinos have a deep trust that "The Lord will provide."

Latino families entering the United States, whether legally or illegally, thus tend to have high birth rates. Mexican-American families, for instance, have an average of 3.3 children, while white and African-American families have an average of slightly more than two children (Jorge Ramos, *The Latino Wave*, 57). The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the U.S. economy will create 21 million new jobs between 2002 and 2012, but that our

nation's workforce will only grow by 17 million during that same period (Immigration Policy Center, "Economic Growth & Immigration: Bridging the Demographic Divide," 1). Thus, the positive impact Latino immigrants have on the overall birth rate in the United States is a positive factor in sustaining economic growth in Colorado and, indeed, across America in the years ahead.

Latinos, whether born in our country or born elsewhere, not only value children, but also value the elderly. In most Latino families, elders are treated with respect and dignity and are regarded as integral members of the family. Grandparents and other elders often help with the raising of children and other household tasks. Even when the elderly are in failing health, they often give more than they take from their loved ones spiritually, if not materially.

Many Christians remain deeply opposed to our nation's liberal abortion laws, but non-Latino churchgoers are for the most part unaware that Latinos tend to hold strong pro-life views. In fact, the National Right to Life Committee estimates that nearly 75 percent of U.S. Latinos identify themselves as "pro-life," and this group has made significant efforts to reach out to this potentially powerful voting bloc.

### ***Tradition***

The dominant American ethos has always been pragmatic, utilitarian, and individualistic. The cultural focus has generally been on the "now," with little concern for the past. For many people, "The American Dream" means finding individual "success," and if that requires that a family must move around often and never develop deep ties to a community, so be it. Each person is encouraged to find his or her own "dream" and to pursue it, without considering how this pursuit is connected to that person's family heritage, extended family, cultural legacy, or community of birth.

Latinos, for the most part, do not share this reductionistic worldview. As one member of the rising generation put it, "America has this weird optimism that dictates that we have to leave the past behind. My generation of Latinos doesn't feel that way at all. We know we come from a rich history and culture, and we want to celebrate that" (Jaime Cortez, quoted in Veronica Chambers, "Generation N," *Newsweek*, 12 July 1999).

Few U.S. Latinos buy into the common cultural view that if something is new, it must necessarily be better. Latinos can

certainly embrace innovations and are open to new ideas, but they always hold on to their traditions and a respect for their cultural heritage even as they stay connected to the demands of the present. In a society in which so many people have lost touch with their family roots and their various cultural heritages, the Latino emphasis on keeping family and cultural traditions alive enriches not only the lives of Latinos but the lives of their non-Latino friends and neighbors, as well.

### ***Spirituality***

The dawn of the twenty-first century is a time of growing secularization across much of American society. Few political leaders base their stands on religious convictions; only a tiny number of corporations and businesses seek to conduct themselves in accord with the gospel or religious values, and the mainstream popular culture is indifferent at best and hostile at worst to "organized religion," especially Christianity. Many U.S. denominations are losing members at an alarming rate, and hundreds of once-thriving churches are closing their doors.

Yet in the midst of these disturbing trends, there is reason for hope. The great growth in the U.S. Latino population over the past quarter of a century has led, as we have already indicated, to revitalization in many areas of the Church that were once in decline. Latinos tend to be more religious than most other American ethnic and racial groups, and the number of agnostic or atheistic Latinos remains quite small. The population boom among Latinos has contributed greatly to the increase in membership seen by thousands of Catholic parishes and Protestant churches all over the United States.

Latino churchgoers tend to be persons of deep personal piety, and they often bring a much-needed enthusiasm to worship services. Predominantly Latino churches have organized outstanding youth programs, engaged in anti-gang work, and developed a wide array of social services to help their neighbors in need. While so many long-established churches and parishes have lost much of their vitality and relevance in their communities, the same cannot be said of most local Latino churches. So, those denominations that can find a way to welcome Latinos, regardless of their immigration status, into their midst will find their good intentions richly rewarded.

### **A Proposed Solution**

The decision facing Colorado voters in November will not be

about an abstraction, such as "public policy," or even an issue, such as "illegal immigration." The decision that voters make will ultimately be about the lives of flesh and blood human beings: mothers, fathers, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and children. Passage of the anti-immigrant laws, in all likelihood, will not save our state's hard-pressed taxpayers a single penny; however, it might very well inflict a high moral price on all of Colorado's residents. Such a development will very likely cause few illegal immigrants to leave our state, but it may very well make them feel angry and embittered against "the system." Approval of the measure will surely exacerbate divisions between Latinos and other ethnic and racial communities in our state. And, the passage of laws so lacking in goodwill will certainly encourage and embolden the haters and extremists on both ends of the political spectrum. Political discourse in our state will remain poisoned long after the advocates of this short-sighted measure have passed from the scene. The votes we cast in November should be to elect a Governor and Legislators who have the courage of their convictions to provide real leadership on this issue and other critical issues facing our State. Real leadership is not measured by who is tougher on Immigrants but by who has a vision for Colorado that brings dignity to all who reside in our wonderful State!

America has traditionally been a land that has welcomed immigrants, or "the teeming masses yearning to breathe free" who are mentioned in the inscription at the base of the Statue of Liberty. Throughout our nation's history, only two periods, 1790-1830 and 1930-1950, have seen relatively low immigration rates (Office of Immigration Statistics, *2003 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 11). Of course, in every generation, voices of doom have arisen to stir up fear and resentment toward "foreigners." Over the years, hundreds of nativist prophets have railed against how "those people" would destroy all that was good and unique about America. But, somehow, the nation built on the idea of "liberty and justice for all" survived the great influx of Irish and German "foreigners," the massive wave of Italian, Slavic, and Jewish immigrants, and the post-World War II inflow of people fleeing Communist tyranny in Hungary, Cuba, Ethiopia, and Vietnam. These earlier immigrants, far from harming our nation, made our economy more prosperous, our social structure stronger, our culture richer, and our churches and places of worship more vital and relevant. Surely, those determined people in the current wave of Latino immigration will, in time, prove the modern-day exclusionists wrong, and help America become an even greater nation than it is today. To seek to impose punitive measures, even of a symbolic nature, against

the illegal immigrants in our midst is not merely misguided (for how can a simple answer resolve a complex problem?); it is, also, in the profoundest sense, un-American.

¿Y que honda? So what now? Let us not leave this discussion without talking about solutions. Lev. 19:33-34 reads, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt." While recognizing that all Christians are aliens in a strange land, the New America Consulting Group offers the following proposal for sensible immigration reform in the spirit of Lev. 19:33-34, treating them as native born:

First, a different approach must be taken toward border security. We must engage Mexico in serious discussion about the issue. What we don't need is a wall between our two countries that may force Mexico to elect a leftist dictatorship. The United States has the necessary clout to ensure a U.S.-Mexico partnership.

Second, we must deal with the illegal immigrants who already reside in the United States. While we admit that illegal immigrants have committed a crime, it is not a felony offense. Keeping that in mind, we suggest the following steps:

1. Give notice to all illegal immigrants that they have six months to register with government authorities in order to get their green card and I.D. They agree to pay a \$750 fine for every adult illegal immigrant. For children under 18 years old, if they entered the country illegally (in other words, if they weren't born in the United States), when they turn 18, they will be expected to go through the same process as adults.
2. The illegal immigrants agree that they will be employed, pay taxes, and enroll their children in school for the next four years. They will also agree that at the end of four years, they will be able to pass a citizenship test in English. The sooner they learn English the easier it will be for all of us.
3. The fines collected will be paid out to local schools in order to provide the necessary English and citizenship classes. This will strengthen local schools, as well as creating ties and engagement between the local schools and the parents/families of immigrants.
4. Deportation and strong penalties should exist for those

illegal immigrants who do not comply with these steps.

## **Conclusion**

If being truly "American" means welcoming immigrants into our communities with open arms, then those of us who are Christians are called to do even more. Two years ago, Mel Gibson's brilliant and visionary film, *The Passion of the Christ*, earned \$370 million at the box office and was viewed by millions in theaters all across the United States. Several million more Americans saw the movie in their churches and homes. Many of us were moved enough to say to ourselves, "Oh, if only I could have been there at Calvary, I might have done something to have eased Jesus' suffering!"

Perhaps such a wish is not a vain one. For let us keep in mind that the same Jesus who suffered and died on Good Friday has also assured us, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," and "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25: 35, 40). How easy it is for us Coloradans to look at our endless blue skies, our soaring mountains, our clear mountain streams, and our dark, deep forests and think of God, and God's boundless love for us. But what a challenge it is for many of us to look into the faces of the illegal immigrants in our midst and find ourselves reminded of God! Yet Mother Teresa often spoke of how Jesus comes to us in a "distressing disguise," namely, that of "the poorest of the poor" (Mother Teresa, *Words to Love By*, 22). Do we have enough faith in Jesus to see him in a sweaty man mowing a lawn, in a tired young woman washing stack after stack of dishes, or in the big brown eyes of the children whose education costs us so much in taxes? Who will these newest Americans be to us, the children of those earlier waves of immigrants who arrived on these shores not as long ago as most of us would like to imagine? Will we see in these hopeful faces enemies to be feared and loathed, or will we see long-lost brothers and sisters, through whom, in their poverty, vulnerability, and marginality, Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for each one of us on Calvary, calls us to love Him more?

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