

RANDOM THOUGHTS  
Rev. David Blanchfield  
April 14, 2013

As many of you know, we have joined an organization called CONECT, Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut. The reason we joined was because they provided us with the way to solve two parts of parish life that were lacking. First, it gave us an immediate and vibrant connection to 27 other denominations, including Episcopal, Baptist, Jewish, Unitarian, and Islamic communities. Second, it gave us a vehicle for putting Catholic social justice teaching into practice. We have always been very good at acts of charity, but we could never quite figure how to implement the well-kept secret of the teaching of the Old Testament prophets as well as the teaching of Popes Leo XIII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. CONECT allows us to do so. It mobilizes 28 congregations, including four in our diocese, to work for the common good.

I myself have been greatly involved in the campaign to get Connecticut driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants. Let me spend a few moments explaining my position. I will begin with the theological reasons, explain my own experience, and then mention the practical.

Catholic social teaching begins with the idea that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore we have basic human rights that belong to us out of justice. Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* puts it this way:

"Flowing from our God given dignity, each person has basic rights and responsibilities. These include the rights to freedom of conscience and religious liberty, to raise a family, TO IMMIGRATE, to live free from unfair discrimination, and to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family. People have a fundamental right to life and those things that make life truly human: food, clothing, housing, health care, education, security, social services and employment. Corresponding to these basic rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society, to respect the rights of others and to work for the common good."

To work for the implementation of that quote is to try and follow the teaching of the prophets and to be about part of the proper mission of the Church.

In my case, over the last two years I have gotten to know many members of St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in New Haven. If I were their pastor, I would be as proud of them as I am of this parish. In the time I have known them I have come to hear their stories and have literally come to see them as brothers and sisters in the Body of

Christ. One young woman told me the story of her mother driving a sick child to the doctor and being stopped for a traffic violation. Her mother was given a ticket and reported to immigration and thus became subject to deportation. Before I connect that story to being a Catholic follower of Jesus, let me give you a brief primer on immigration.

My paternal grandparents were born in Ireland and had to leave Ireland because of the problems there. Because they came before the 1920's they did not need a visa, just someone to sponsor them. If they were trying to come today, even if they had a relative here they could not come legally for many, many years. Immigrants from Mexico presently have to wait 17 years for a visa. If I were married with children and living in a country where there was no work or way to support my family, I would choose to enter America illegally to feed my family. By the way, it is not a criminal violation to enter illegally just a civil one. If you are found, the government does not put you in jail, unless you have committed a serious crime. You are rounded up, sent to a deportation camp, separated from your family, and held without being able to call anyone.

If I were to enter this country to save my family, as did that mother from St. Rose, I would be breaking an American civil law, but not the law of God. Remember, Catholic teaching is that anyone unable to feed their family has a God given right to immigrate.

So, I have come to see and even welcome the undocumented at St. Rose as my brothers and sisters in the Faith. If my grandparents had not been able to come without a visa, at worst they might have died and I would not be here; at best, I would be a priest in Ireland. And not here at St. Jerome.

CONNECT has listened to the concerns of the faithful at St. Rose and so all of us are working for legislation that would get driver's licenses for the undocumented and prevent mothers from being deported and separated from their children.

But here is the good news. Although I am working on it for theological reasons, it also makes great common sense. If undocumented drivers had licenses they would have to learn English, pass a driver's test, and would drive more safely. They could get insurance and your and my insurance costs would come down. Also it would mean money for the state in licensee fees and car registrations.

Two of our young parishioners just became policemen. When they stop an undocumented at night, a driver's license would help our parishioner know who is being stopped and his or her driving record. People with driver's licenses would be more likely to stay at the scene of an accident and report crimes done to them. In every way this will make our Connecticut streets safer.

This law has passed in: Washington, New Mexico, Illinois, Maryland, Vermont and is being considered in others. Excellent procedures are in place to guarantee identity and residency. As a follower of Jesus and as a Roman Catholic priest, I am committed to this and am working hard to pass this legislation in the current session. I hope you will support this good work.

**Fr. David**

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### ***How Connecticut Benefits When All Motorists Get Licensed***

- Police will be able to identify motorists during stops and check their traffic records.
- Witnesses to crimes will be more comfortable **reporting crimes** to the police and cooperating in investigations once they have identification.
- Drivers will be more likely to **stay at the scene of an accident** to aide police and emergency workers and exchange insurance information with other motorists.
- Police will be unable to use "driving without a license" as a pretext for racial **profiling and harassment**. This is what led to the federal indictments in East Haven.
- Limited court time and jail space will not be wasted on drivers who are there solely for driving without a license or insurance.
- **Insurance rates will fall for everyone**. Connecticut policy holders will **save \$20 million** each year.
- The State will **earn two million dollars** in revenue per year from new registrations.
- Immigrants who can drive legally will be more likely to work, spend, and contribute to our economy.

### ***What Other States Are Doing***

- **Washington and New Mexico** already require all immigrant motorists to get driver's licenses.
- Since New Mexico made this change in 2003, its rate of uninsured motorists fell from 33% to under 9%. New Mexico also saw a 32% decrease in alcohol-related crashes and a 23% drop in traffic fatalities. Both states also use strong procedures to verify identity and residence documents.
- **Illinois' legislature recently passed this legislation with bi-partisan support** and Gov. Quinn signed it into law on Sunday, January 27, 2013.