

Citizenship

Week 2 (March 9-15)

Matthew 25: 31-40

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me." Then the righteous will answer Him, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" The King will answer and say to them, "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

Widian's Story



“Raised in a tiny village in Galilee, my father, the eldest of 5 children, was raised by loving parents who made a meager living as poor farmers. My mother, who was raised in an orphanage from a young age by a community of Sisters in Jerusalem, married my father at seventeen. During my childhood, my father worked as a mechanic and my mother as a teacher. While our home was filled with love, my parents recognized that their children would have better opportunities for education, advancement, and success in the U.S.

Our family arrived to the United States on a temporary visitors’ visa, which we overstayed after six months. My parents made great attempts to become “legal,” spending money on attorneys who stole from us and gave us false hope, only to leave our family wondering if we were ever going to have the chance to stop living under the shadows and fear of deportation. Beginning at the age of eight (and beyond), I did not quite understand what our immigration status meant or even where it stood. The only thing I knew was that our status was a secret and we were never to mention that fact to anyone, ever.

I entered college without the ability to receive federal financial aid because of my status. My parents helped support me until I began working and supporting myself. After completing graduate school, I moved across the country to complete a year of service with the Center for FaithJustice, which helped me see the intersection between faith, service, and social justice.

Profoundly touched by my experience as an undocumented immigrant, and especially in recognition of how blessed my family has been relative to millions of others, my experience has informed my commitment to supporting those most in need. Throughout my many years as a social worker, I have had the honor to meet God in inner-city at-risk youth, homeless men and women, pregnant and parenting women struggling to maintain sobriety, the elderly, faithful friends and colleagues, my faith community, family, and strangers.

Recently, three months shy of my thirty-first birthday, with no criminal record, having lived in the U.S. at least five consecutive years and arrived before the age of 16, and holding an advanced degree, I completed my application for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. After a seven-hour wait in line to complete my application, I was certain that God

had awaited my arrival in that Catholic Charities immigration office since the Fourth of July twenty-two years earlier. But my new status is bittersweet as I, along with millions of others, pray in hopeful expectations that undocumented immigrants all over the country will have the opportunity to live freely in our home.”

Why Immigration Reform Must Include a Path to Citizenship

From the US Conference of Catholic Bishops Justice for Immigrants Campaign

Background: The U.S. Senate recently passed an immigration bill that contains a path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented persons in the country. The House of Representatives has, to date, refused to consider a bill with a path to citizenship, suggesting that they could simply give legal status to some immigrants or not confer any legal status at all. The U.S. Catholic bishops strongly support a path to citizenship for the undocumented, for the following reasons:

- An immigration bill that does not provide a path to citizenship but simply legal status to the 11 million would sanction a permanent underclass in our society, with one portion of the population without the same rights as the majority. As U.S. history has informed us, this is a recipe for social unrest and potential exploitation of a minority population, contrary to the founding ideals of the republic. It would keep a large group in our country disenfranchised, unable to petition their government as the majority can and unable to choose their leaders. This is not the American way.
- Citizenship provides full protection from deportation. Under current law, a person can be deported for a wide variety of non-violent offenses, such as drug possession, petty larceny, or fraud, even if they are permanent residents with a green card. With citizenship, the federal government cannot deport a person from the country, away from their family and livelihood. Thus, anything less than citizenship would subject a portion of the population to penalties not applicable to the majority.
- Citizenship confers full membership in our society and provides full protection from our government against foreign actors. For example, a U.S. citizen can receive protection from the U.S. government overseas in a crisis situation, or from requests from a foreign government for extradition. U.S. citizens also can travel more freely, as they are able to use a U.S. passport and thus gain admittance to other countries without needing a visa.
- A path to citizenship would ensure those who earn their citizenship are good citizens. If they are willing to meet all the requirements to become an American citizen, then they certainly will appreciate being U.S. citizens and contribute to their new nation. Are these not the type of citizens our government would want? It also would ensure that immigrants take pride in their new country and are socially accepted in our culture.
- A path to citizenship would not be an amnesty, as many would argue, but would require immigrants to earn their way and pay restitution for their illegal presence. They also would have to learn English and work.
- Providing citizenship to immigrants does not mean they would vote for one party over another. Immigrant populations are just like any other group of persons, and have a wide range of political views and loyalties.

For Reflection:

What are the ways Widian served as an example of a model citizen, despite her status as an undocumented immigrant? How does her story relate to others that I have met?

How might other aspiring Americans contribute to society if they were able to come out of the shadows?

How do we appeal to Congress to pass immigration reform legislation that is inclusive of all migrants, regardless of when they arrived in the United States?