



# DIOCESE OF CHEYENNE

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*Office of the Legislative Liaison*

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## **Protecting the Unborn and the Immigrant: A Uniquely Catholic Perspective**

One of the challenges of engaging our divided culture from a Catholic perspective is realizing that, at some point, you will likely offend everyone. In a sense, you become an “equal opportunity offender.” But what standard of measure makes it a Catholic perspective? What distinguishes our perspective from other ideologies?

Since I started working as the Legislative Liaison for the diocese, I’ve thought much about this. As a “people-pleaser,” I really don’t like the thought of offending anyone. I have come to understand one thing which distinguishes the Catholic worldview from any other is our focus on the inherent dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God. This dignity does not depend upon government recognition. However, our efforts should always be focused on inviting others to see the dignity of all persons so that government policies will begin to reflect this truth.

### **The Dignity of the Unborn**

Last year, the Wyoming Legislature passed HB182 which ensured that women considering abortion in Wyoming would be informed of their right to see an ultrasound and listen to the heartbeat of their children. The passage of this bill was a significant victory, because the unborn do not have a voice. But a picture really is worth a thousand words. Studies show that once a mother sees an ultrasound, she is much more likely to decide to carry her child to full term. Like our faith, life in the womb is not an idea, but an incarnate reality. An ultrasound illuminates that reality.

### **The Dignity of Immigrants**

In October, I traveled to Laramie to listen to a panel discussion on immigration and the DACA program. Until recently, I had never heard of DACA, which stands for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. It is a program that was instituted under the last administration in 2012 which affects about 800,000 young people and their families. These young people crossed the border with their parents when they were children. Some have no memory of living anywhere else.

At the panel discussion, current University of Wyoming students spoke about what it was like growing up undocumented. One young student talked about how she didn’t know she was undocumented until her school sponsored a trip. She really wanted to go, but her mom wouldn’t let her because she was afraid she would be discovered, and the family would be deported. One by one, undocumented students came forward and told their stories.

The DACA program did not give them amnesty. It was a temporary program they could apply for, paying a \$465 fee, and if they were given DACA status, they could live, work and go to school in the U.S. without fear of being deported. According to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services website, the requirements for applying for DACA were:

*You must have been under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012; came to the United States before reaching your 16th birthday; have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007, up to the present time; were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012, and at the time of making your request for consideration of deferred action with USCIS; had no lawful status on June 15, 2012; are currently in school, have graduated or obtained a certificate of completion from high school, have obtained a general education development (GED) certificate, or are an honorably discharged veteran of the Coast Guard or Armed Forces of the United States; and have not been convicted of a felony, significant misdemeanor, or three or more other misdemeanors, and do not otherwise pose a threat to national security or public safety.*

Every two years, DACA recipients would have to reapply and pay the \$465 fee again. It did not create a clear path to citizenship for them. In many cases, applying for citizenship means leaving the U.S. and applying for a visa, which can take up to a decade or more. At that point, one is granted the right to re-enter the U.S. and continue the process for citizenship. For some of these kids, applying for citizenship means leaving family and home for an indefinite period, with no certainty of ever obtaining citizenship.

In September, the current administration decided not to renew the DACA program. It will lapse in March of 2018. The President has called on Congress to pass legislation to fix the problem with a more permanent solution.

If we put aside the politics for a moment, we can see that DACA has allowed these kids to come out of the shadows. For the first time, these kids have become visible to the general public. Like the unborn revealed by an ultrasound, DACA revealed these very real flesh-and-blood children. Now that DACA has not been renewed, these kids are scared. In good faith, they gave the government their information, including their home addresses. Day to day, they live with the reality that something as minor as a car's broken turn signal could mean they or another family member won't come home.

As Catholics, we recognize the dignity of persons does not depend upon government recognition, whether by laws or documentation; rather, human dignity is inherent and God-given. We should encourage our legislators in Washington to remember this as they seek immigration reform.

There is a possibility that protective legislation for DACA recipients could be attached to a pending budget and appropriations bill or other vehicle on or around December 8, 2017. If that does not happen, further legislation will be needed.

On July 20 and 26, respectively, the Senate and the House of Representatives introduced the 2017 DREAM Act. Archbishop Joe Vásquez, who is the USCCB Chair of the Committee on Migration, wrote a letter of support for the DREAM Act. Bishop Steven has also written a letter of support, which is available on the Diocese of Cheyenne website. With the DREAM Act, Congress could permanently protect DACA recipients and provide them with a more realistic path to citizenship.

The dignity of persons is not a partisan issue. It's a human issue.

Please consider contacting our Wyoming delegation to encourage them to support the DREAM Act. Because they can be flooded with spam emails, you must go to their website to fill out a contact form. You may also contact their offices by phone.

Senator Enzi's office: 202 224-3424.

Senator Barrasso's office: 202-224-6441

Representative Cheney's office: 202-225-2311