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# Capuchin Vocation Update

Province of St. Joseph

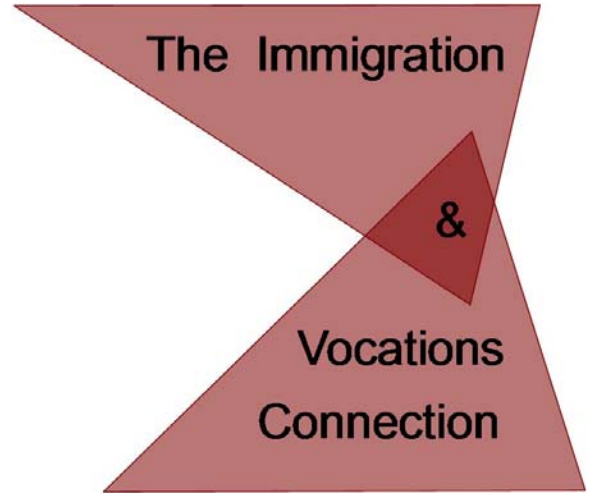
## It's now ..... or never?

*(Midwest Capuchin vocation director Bill Hugo increasingly has been working with inquirers and candidates who are undocumented immigrants. This has included looking for options to legalize candidates' statuses and studying the reform of U.S. immigration policy. Vocation Update takes this opportunity to interview Hugo about the long haul of this issue and recent dramatic developments.)*

**IN THE PAST, THE CAPUCHIN VOCATION OFFICE WOULD NOT ENGAGE WITH UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS. NOW, YOU STILL SAY THAT THE PROVINCE CANNOT ACCEPT THEM INTO THE PROVINCE'S FORMATION PROGRAM, BUT YOU ARE EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION WITH THEM. WHY THE CHANGE?** (Hugo): The answer is simple. The prospect of meaningful immigration reform has emerged as a real possibility for the first time since President Reagan signed the last immigration reform bill more than 20 years ago in 1986. A year before the mid-term elections, the push to successfully pass such legislation seemed quite good. So, in anticipation of a positive outcome, the Vocation Office decided to keep in contact with inquirers who were undocumented immigrants, thinking that it was just a matter of time for the legislation to pass. It seemed reasonable to prepare some inquirers for formal entrance after the anticipated legislation.

**HAVE THINGS TURNED OUT AS YOU IMAGINED?** (Hugo): Those hopes were dashed during the spring and summer of 2006 when the U.S. House passed a bill focusing on border security and the Senate passed a bill creating a broad path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants already in the country. The conference committee was unable to resolve the differences in the two bills, and the reform failed for the moment.

Many of us working for reform were quite disappointed and rather discouraged about anything changing soon. But when the mid-term elections changed leadership in *both* chambers of Congress, our hopes were raised again. However, those renewed hopes were dashed again when it seemed factions in both political parties were opposed to a broad path to citizenship. But quietly behind the scenes, the White House was meeting with members of both parties, both chambers, and all across the spectrum of positions on immigration reform to pound out a compromise. Few people thought they had much of a chance to succeed. That's why it was a great surprise for me to wake up to radio reports on



May 18<sup>th</sup> that the group was ready to propose such a compromise.

**SO ARE THINGS LOOKING GOOD?** (Hugo) I am learning not to get my hopes up, even though it is my opinion that this is the best and last hope for reform before the presidential election. The compromise proposal has all the strengths and weakness of such agreements. All political interests can find something in the bill they wanted. And all political interests will also find something they most likely abhor. It's still unsure whether members of Congress will find more motivation to vote for what they can get or more motivation to vote against what they can't stomach.



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# Vocation Update



**WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE BILL?** (Hugo): I'm like everyone else. There are elements of the proposed bill I like and there are elements I find repulsive. So, for me the

challenge is to discern whether it is better to support this bill because of what it achieves, or to reject it because of the parts with which I disagree.

I believe the U.S. Catholic Bishops have the same challenging question to answer. The reason is that the compromise legislation would create a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who entered the USA before last January 1<sup>st</sup> and who meet other criteria including paying several fines. Regardless of the terms of citizenship for these people, the proposed compromise bill will give more than 12 million people already in the USA a legal status that allows them to work, allows employers to give them work, protects them at work, makes health care available, and allows them to take loans for higher education, among other things. And, importantly for the Catholic Church in America, the compromise bill will allow seminaries and religious orders to accept these men and women into their formation programs. The down side of the compromise is that unification of families will not have such a high priority in determining *future* legal immigration and many low skilled workers will only be able to enter the USA for work temporarily and only up to six years.

**HOW DO YOU WEIGH THESE CHOICES?** (Hugo): I favor the compromise bill, since nothing better can be achieved for quite some time. I think Americans who support reform should take what they can get, even if they can't get everything they want. That's the nature of compromise in our democracy. The benefits are high and should not be easily dismissed as postponable because reformers didn't get everything. This compromise will legalize at least 12 million people. That's an incredible achievement all by itself. Further, once these 12 million are legalized, that status will not be easily reversed. I imagine that only a felony might revoke one's legal status. On the other hand, the negative elements of the bill seem to be provisions that can be changed later with the support of the American people. Unification of families can be elevated in importance when determining which new immigrants could enter the USA. The guest worker program can

always be adjusted. These provisions are unlike the provision granting legal status. That provision will probably never be revoked except in extreme cases.

**WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO SAY NO BILL IS BETTER THAN A BAD BILL?** (Hugo): The compromise bill is neither a good bill nor a bad bill; it's a *mixed* bill. That's the nature of compromise, and this compromise bill is better than *no* bill in my opinion. Undocumented immigrants have been waiting 20 years to legally work, pay taxes that are attributed to them, own property, receive educational loans and scholarships, get legal drivers licenses, and join religious orders like the Capuchins. To those who say we should wait for a "good" bill, I ask how long should we wait? Another three years? Five years? Another twenty? How can anyone be sure a "better" bill will ever pass Congress and be signed by the President? I believe America should accept the compromise and work to improve its shortcomings later. The important thing for now is to pass a bill that legalizes the status of 12 million disenfranchised people in the United States. I strongly encourage anyone who wants to help these 12 million to get on the phone or their computers to encourage senators to vote for the compromise. And supporters shouldn't wait another day since the Senate will vote on the compromise during June.



And what about candidates for the Midwest Capuchins?

Recently, 5 candidates have been undocumented immigrants making acceptance to postulancy impossible.

3 of the 5 would have been postulants this August had they held a legal status.

2 of the 5 are SLS graduates.

Anecdotally, it seems 3-9 additional men would be candidates today if they knew they could be accepted into Capuchin formation.