



February 6, 2025

*“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them.”*  
Leviticus 19:33 (NAB-RE)

Sadly, our nation’s immigration system is broken. For too long, our laws on paper said “stop, no entry,” while in fact, for economic and political reasons, undocumented migrants were allowed inside, sometimes with the encouragement of business interests and even our government. As Pope Francis has said, migrants have been too often treated “as pawns on the chessboard of humanity.”

Elected officials in both major political parties have failed to rise above political calculation and collaborate on a solution rooted in respect for migrants and the common good of the nation. This leadership failure has resulted in repeated conflicts at the border and in our communities that have only grown worse.

The Biden Administration’s migration policies exacerbated these problems, and as a response, President Trump has resolved to instigate measures focused primarily on enforcement and deportations. Of particular concern is his decision to rescind the policies that had previously limited enforcement at “sensitive” locations such as churches, schools, shelters, and hospitals. It is often precisely in these places that we, as Catholics, respond to Christ’s command to care for our “neighbors” without discrimination. It is not difficult to imagine how the changed policy could interfere with the exercise of our faith to serve those in need (cf. Matt. 25:35).

To the extent that the new Administration’s actions focus on detaining and deporting those with criminal records who pose a danger to society, we offer our whole-hearted support. We oppose, however, any campaign of indiscriminate immigration enforcement that threatens to unnecessarily or unjustly separate the families of those we have come to know as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

We repeat our plea to Congress for comprehensive immigration reform to fix our broken system, and we appeal to the Administration for a revised order that would establish that, absent exigent circumstances, no immigration enforcement action may take place on Catholic church or school property without a properly executed warrant.

### **Keeping Families Together**

In the past few decades, millions of migrants have settled in the United States. Many have built their lives in our communities and started their families here. Their children born here, like us, enjoy U.S. citizenship. Many of these immigrants have been long strengthening the fabric of our society and American life.

The reality is that even though we, as a nation, have come to rely on undocumented migrants and their many contributions to our communities, they have far too often been treated as political pawns. Their labor is exploited, and they are threatened with deportation and demonized whenever it is politically expedient. They are forced to live in fear and operate often within the shadows of society and the economy. And now they are

at risk even in our Catholic churches and schools. Such behavior is a hallmark of what Pope Francis calls a “throw-away” culture.

We encourage the Administration to conduct immigration enforcement prudently, cautiously, and always with human dignity in mind. Central to protecting human dignity is respecting the security and integrity of the family. And families—especially those with minor children and those whose children or siblings are citizens—should not be separated and deported. As church leaders ministering to many of the immigrant families in Minnesota, we see the wisdom in compassionate “families first” policies, such as the “deferred actions” for childhood arrivals (DACA) and for parents of Americans (DAPA) that have been suggested in the past.

We are a nation of laws that must be respected, but taking immigration enforcement actions using a simplistic calculus based on an individual’s legal status is unjust. Justice is about establishing right relationships with one another and giving the other their due. Some proportionate penalties for those who have broken the law may be warranted, but many of our migrant brothers and sisters deserve better than swift deportation given their contributions to our society.

### **Not ‘Open Borders’**

The fact that we advocate for comprehensive immigration reform and the just enforcement of laws against those *already residing here* is not simple-minded advocacy for “open borders.” We recognize that public officials have the responsibility of protecting their citizens and both promoting public safety and putting the needs of their people first. When necessary, governments should institute orderly migration policies, which sometimes require strong border security measures. Walls, for example, can have doors in them for those who need refuge and who exercise the right to migrate.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) states, “[p]olitical authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions.” A nation is not required to receive all who seek to enter. It may, from time to time, pause immigration and refugee resettlement when necessary to ensure or restore an orderly system free of corruption and abuse, or when the well-being of citizens needs to be prioritized due to limited resources or other concerns. (*See, e.g.*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society,” 1988). Among those concerns includes the ability and desire of immigrants or refugees to “respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens” (CCC 2241).

It is incumbent, however, on the nation to ensure that it continues to evaluate in justice how, in solidarity, it can welcome the stranger consistent with its duties toward its citizens.

### **A Human Rights Test**

In his book, *Immigration and the Next America*, Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles describes our response to the broken immigration system as an important human rights test for our nation. We repeat our call for citizens to appeal to Congress and the President for comprehensive reform of our broken system that includes resources for improved border security, a generous but also prudent welcome of refugees and those

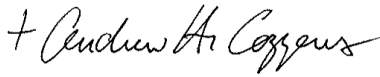
seeking asylum that does not overly burden local communities, and pathways to legal status for long-term undocumented residents.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, intercede for us so that we can see and respond to each other, immigrant and citizen, through our common identity as children of the one Father, and therefore as brothers and sisters. This is the identity that transcends all others, including legal status.

Sincerely,



Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda  
Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis



Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens  
Diocese of Crookston



Bishop Daniel J. Felton  
Diocese of Duluth



Bishop Chad W. Zielinski  
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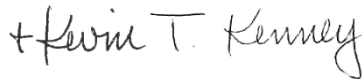
Bishop Patrick M. Neary, C.S.C.  
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Bishop Robert E. Barron  
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