



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

February 11, 2025

### WISCONSIN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' PASTORAL LETTER ON IMMIGRATION

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In these challenging times, we, the bishops of Wisconsin, want all immigrants to know that we are here to walk with you – and that God Himself is with you. The prophet Isaiah encourages us, “Do not fear: I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand” (Is 41:10). Our Lord is with us always, especially in uncertain and fearful times. In laying out Church teaching below, we seek to touch the hearts and minds of all who live in this great nation and to uphold human dignity, the common good, and the rule of law.

#### **Protecting Human Dignity by Welcoming the Stranger**

- The Catholic Church’s position on immigration is based in the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ insisted that when we welcome the stranger, we welcome Him (Mt 25:35,40).
- Our Catholic faith further teaches that “more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent that they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of security, and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 2241).
- When the Church supports immigrants, she is not doing so to impede the lawful enforcement of immigration laws, nor to encourage illegal entry. Rather, without contradiction, the Church instructs everyone to follow the law and to uphold fundamental human rights.
- In U.S. law, every person, regardless of immigration status, has certain fundamental human rights, which can never be infringed.
- All people have the right to religious freedom to attend church services and to receive sacraments and pastoral care.

#### **Upholding the Rule of Law**

- While the Catholic Church always welcomes the stranger, she also recognizes the right of nations to regulate immigration for the sake of the common good (CCC 2241).
- Nations have sovereign rights to control their borders. Indeed, safe and secure borders help everyone.
- The Church opposes both completely open borders and completely closed borders.
- Immigration policy must achieve a proper balance between migrant rights and sovereign rights.

## Fostering the Common Good through Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- This current crisis exists because our U.S. immigration system has been broken for decades, no matter which party holds power.
- Legal pathways to entry, residency, and citizenship have become so few and so burdensome that many individuals risk everything to enter illegally. This puts them in danger of exploitation.
- Our nation will continue to face challenges without implementing immigration policies that are balanced and humane. Mass deportation of millions of people is not the answer.
- Distinctions must be made between immigrants who present genuine risks and dangers to society and therefore may be lawfully expelled, and those who have been here for years, have no criminal record, and have lived peacefully and contributed to the common good.
- The U.S. bishops have long advocated for [comprehensive immigration reform](#) that enables legal entry, provides pathways to citizenship, and maintains family unity. As our brother bishops [wrote this past November](#),

We hope that our country can develop an effective asylum system for those fleeing persecution and an immigration system that keeps our borders safe and secure, with enforcement policies that focus on those who present risks and dangers to society, particularly efforts to reduce gang activity, stem the flow of drugs, and end human trafficking. The United States should have an immigration system that protects vulnerable migrants and their families, many of whom have already been victimized by criminal actors.

### To Our Immigrant Sisters and Brothers

We want you to know of our love for you. You have inherent dignity. There are many secular and religious agencies, including our own Catholic organizations, ready to assist you. We encourage you to know your rights and obligations as immigrants. Carry a [Know Your Rights](#) card and read the other [resources](#) provided by [CLINIC](#) (Catholic Legal Immigration Network). If you have questions or are in need of assistance, our Catholic Charities in the [Archdiocese of Milwaukee](#), the [Diocese of Green Bay](#), and the [Diocese of La Crosse](#) provide specialized and accredited immigration legal services. Those living in the Diocese of Superior will be directed to Catholic Charities in the Diocese of La Crosse. In the Diocese of Madison, the same services are provided by the [Catholic Multicultural Center](#).

### To All Catholics and People of Good Will

We are all sisters and brothers in Christ, made in the image and likeness of God. Let us all show great tenderness and solidarity to those who fear that their families could be separated and their lives uprooted. Let us press our federal elected officials so that they finally pass comprehensive immigration reform. As citizens, it is our responsibility to ensure that we are governed by just laws. There is no inherent contradiction in upholding human dignity, the common good, and the rule of law.

The United States is a nation of immigrants. It is a nation where immigrants breathe free and contribute astonishing energy and creativity. Let us resist the temptation to consider this great land of ours as only for its current citizens. Everything we have is given to us by God and therefore we are called to offer the love of God to all.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, counseled, “Am I not here, I who am your mother? ... Let nothing else worry or disturb you.” We ask for her intercession as we pray that citizens and immigrants may work together to uphold the dignity of every human being and the common good of our state and nation. May we be sisters and brothers to each other and together resolve to be one, peaceful nation under God.

Most Reverend Jeffrey S. Grob, Archbishop of Milwaukee

Most Reverend Donald J. Hying, Bishop of Madison

Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay

Most Reverend James P. Powers, Bishop of Superior

Most Reverend Gerard W. Battersby, Bishop of La Crosse

Most Reverend Jeffrey R. Haines, Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee

Most Reverend James T. Schuerman, Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee

Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKI, Archbishop Emeritus of Milwaukee

Most Reverend William P. Callahan, Bishop Emeritus of La Crosse



# The Holy See

---

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS  
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

*Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,*

I am writing today to address a few words to you in these delicate moments that you are living as Pastors of the People of God who walk together in the United States of America.

1. The journey from slavery to freedom that the People of Israel traveled, as narrated in the Book of Exodus, invites us to look at the reality of our time, so clearly marked by the phenomenon of migration, as a decisive moment in history to reaffirm not only our faith in a God who is always close, incarnate, migrant and refugee, but also the infinite and transcendent dignity of every human person. [1]

2. These words with which I begin are not an artificial construct. Even a cursory examination of the Church's social doctrine emphatically shows that Jesus Christ is the true Emmanuel (cf. *Mt* 1:23); he did not live apart from the difficult experience of being expelled from his own land because of an imminent risk to his life, and from the experience of having to take refuge in a society and a culture foreign to his own. The Son of God, in becoming man, also chose to live the drama of immigration. I like to recall, among other things, the words with which Pope Pius XII began his Apostolic Constitution on the Care of Migrants, which is considered the "Magna Carta" of the Church's thinking on migration:

"The family of Nazareth in exile, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, emigrants in Egypt and refugees there to escape the wrath of an ungodly king, are the model, the example and the consolation of emigrants and pilgrims of every age and country, of all refugees of every condition who, beset by persecution or necessity, are forced to leave their homeland, beloved family and dear friends for foreign lands." [2]

3. Likewise, Jesus Christ, loving everyone with a universal love, educates us in the permanent

recognition of the dignity of every human being, without exception. In fact, when we speak of “infinite and transcendent dignity,” we wish to emphasize that the most decisive value possessed by the human person surpasses and sustains every other juridical consideration that can be made to regulate life in society. Thus, all the Christian faithful and people of good will are called upon to consider the legitimacy of norms and public policies in the light of the dignity of the person and his or her fundamental rights, not vice versa.

4. I have followed closely the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations. The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality. At the same time, one must recognize the right of a nation to defend itself and keep communities safe from those who have committed violent or serious crimes while in the country or prior to arrival. That said, the act of deporting people who in many cases have left their own land for reasons of extreme poverty, insecurity, exploitation, persecution or serious deterioration of the environment, damages the dignity of many men and women, and of entire families, and places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness.

5. This is not a minor issue: an authentic rule of law is verified precisely in the dignified treatment that all people deserve, especially the poorest and most marginalized. The true common good is promoted when society and government, with creativity and strict respect for the rights of all — as I have affirmed on numerous occasions — welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates the most fragile, unprotected and vulnerable. This does not impede the development of a policy that regulates orderly and legal migration. However, this development cannot come about through the privilege of some and the sacrifice of others. What is built on the basis of force, and not on the truth about the equal dignity of every human being, begins badly and will end badly.

6. Christians know very well that it is only by affirming the infinite dignity of all that our own identity as persons and as communities reaches its maturity. Christian love is not a concentric expansion of interests that little by little extend to other persons and groups. In other words: the human person is not a mere individual, relatively expansive, with some philanthropic feelings! The human person is a subject with dignity who, through the constitutive relationship with all, especially with the poorest, can gradually mature in his identity and vocation. The true *ordo amoris* that must be promoted is that which we discover by meditating constantly on the parable of the “Good Samaritan” (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37), that is, by meditating on the love that builds a fraternity open to all, without exception. [3]

7. But worrying about personal, community or national identity, apart from these considerations, easily introduces an ideological criterion that distorts social life and imposes the will of the strongest as the criterion of truth.

8. I recognize your valuable efforts, dear brother bishops of the United States, as you work closely with migrants and refugees, proclaiming Jesus Christ and promoting fundamental human rights. God will richly reward all that you do for the protection and defense of those who are considered less valuable, less important or less human!

9. I exhort all the faithful of the Catholic Church, and all men and women of good will, not to give in to narratives that discriminate against and cause unnecessary suffering to our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters. With charity and clarity we are all called to live in solidarity and fraternity, to build bridges that bring us ever closer together, to avoid walls of ignominy and to learn to give our lives as Jesus Christ gave his for the salvation of all.

10. Let us ask Our Lady of Guadalupe to protect individuals and families who live in fear or pain due to migration and/or deportation. May the “*Virgen morena*”, who knew how to reconcile peoples when they were at enmity, grant us all to meet again as brothers and sisters, within her embrace, and thus take a step forward in the construction of a society that is more fraternal, inclusive and respectful of the dignity of all.

Faternally,

Francis

*From the Vatican, 10 February 2025*

---

[1] Cf. Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Declaration \*Dignitas infinita\* on human dignity](#), 2 April 2024.

[2] Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution [Exsul Familia](#), 1 August 1952: “Exsul Familia Nazarethana Iesus, Maria, Ioseph, cum ad Aegyptum emigrans tum in Aegypto profuga impii regis iram aufugiens, typus, exemplar et praesidium exstat omnium quorumlibet temporum et locorum emigrantium, peregrinorum ac profugorum omne genus, qui, vel metu persecutionum vel egestate compulsi, patrium locum suavesque parentes et propinquos ac dulces amicos derelinquere coguntur et aliena petere.”

[3] Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter [Fratelli tutti](#), 3 October 2020.