

Moving beyond simplistic solutions and hateful rhetoric that define polarized immigration debate

A statement of Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSPS, about reforming the broken immigration system

I join my voice with other Catholic bishops decrying the threat of widespread Department of Homeland Security announced immigration enforcement actions and the Administration's new Interim Final Rule to drastically limit asylum.

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said that the Administration's new rule on asylum eligibility adds further barriers to asylum-seekers' ability to access life-saving protection, shirks our moral duty, and will prevent the United States from taking its usual leading role in the international community as a provider of asylum protection.

"I ask that persons fleeing for their lives be permitted to seek refuge in the U.S. and all those facing removal proceedings be afforded due process," he stated. "All who are at or within our borders should be treated with compassion and dignity."

Bishop Joe Vásquez of Austin, chair of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration, also criticized the proposed raids.

"We recognize the right of nations to control their borders in a just and proportionate manner," Bishop Vásquez said. "However, broad enforcement actions instigate panic in our communities and will not serve as an effective deterrent to irregular migration. Instead, we should focus on the root causes in Central America that have compelled so many to leave their homes in search of safety and reform our immigration system with a view toward justice and the common good."

The U.S. Catholic bishops have sought to courageously uphold the basic human rights of migrants and call on Catholics to not only welcome fellow migrants to alleviate their suffering, but the bishops also call on U.S. Catholics to work for systemic change, especially comprehensive immigration reform. The bishops have offered practical policy solutions to several administrations proposing compelling moral arguments to bring the estimated 12 million undocumented migrants in the United States out of the shadows. Hispanic and non-Hispanic

bishops together are lobbying Congress to fix our broken immigration system and denounce the rising tide of dehumanizing rhetoric.

Hate speech fans the flame of fear and causes good people – including many Catholics – to see migrants – most of them Catholic also -- as invaders rather than brothers and sisters.

The task for Catholic advocates, especially lay leaders in Church and society, is to make their voices heard in a way that creates political leverage for an agreement that provides a fair path to citizenship for the undocumented and reforms other aspects of our immigration system in a humane manner. This, of course, will not be easy, but we must remain focused on this vision.

As a Pilgrim Church, we must live our faith as migrants and in solidarity with actual migrants, who are only trying to survive and to share their gifts with us. We must also speak out against all forms of xenophobia and discrimination, both in the public square and within our Church. As Catholics, we cannot recoil from the fear being peddled by some in the political world and from misguided Catholics who have forgotten their core identity as pilgrims in this world. Everyone has God-given dignity which must be honored. Every person is created in the image and likeness of God! The Lord calls upon us to stand by our brothers and sisters and to act on their behalf, to “welcome the stranger” and “do unto others as we would want them to do to us.” Let us apply the gospel message faithfully and boldly to the human problem of immigration!

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