

LETTER OF THE HISPANIC/LATINO BISHOPS TO IMMIGRANTS

Dear immigrant sisters and brothers,

May the peace and grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you!

We the undersigned Hispanic/Latino Bishops of the United States wish to let those of you who lack proper authorization to live and work in our country know that you are not alone, or forgotten. We recognize that every human being, authorized or not, is an image of God and therefore possesses infinite value and dignity. We open our arms and hearts to you, and we receive you as members of our Catholic family. As pastors, we direct these words to you from the depths of our heart.

In a very special way we want to thank you for the Christian values you manifest to us with your lives—your sacrifice for the well-being of your families, your determination and perseverance, your joy of life, your profound faith and fidelity despite your insecurity and many difficulties. You contribute much to the welfare of our nation in the economic, cultural and spiritual arenas.

The economic crisis has had an impact on the entire U.S. community. Regretfully, some in reaction to this environment of uncertainty show disdain for immigrants and even blame them for the crisis. We will not find a solution to our problems by sowing hatred. We will find the solution by sowing a sense of solidarity among all workers and co-workers —immigrants and citizens—who live together in the United States.

In your suffering faces we see the true face of Jesus Christ. We are well aware of the great sacrifice you make for your families' well-being. Many of you perform the most difficult jobs and receive miserable salaries and no health insurance or social security. Despite your contributions to the well-being of our country, instead of receiving our thanks, you are often treated as criminals because you have violated current immigration laws.

We are also very aware of the pain suffered by those families who have experienced the deportation of one of their members. We are conscious of the frustration of youth and young adults who have grown up in this country and whose dreams are shattered because they lack legal immigration status. We also know of the anxiety of those whose application process for permanent residency is close to completion and of the anguish of those who live daily under the threat of deportation. This situation cries out to God for a worthy and humane solution.

We acknowledge that, at times, actions taken in regard to immigrants have made you feel ignored or abandoned, especially when no objection is raised to the false impressions that are promoted within our society. Through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops we have testified before the U.S. Congress for change in our immigration laws and for legislation that respects family unity and provides an orderly and reasonable process for unauthorized persons to attain citizenship. The new law should include a program for worker visas that respects the immigrants' human rights, provides for their basic needs and ensures that they enter our country and work in a safe and orderly manner. We will also continue to advocate on behalf of global economic justice, so that our brothers and sisters can find employment opportunities in their countries of origin that offer a living wage, and allow them to live with dignity.

Immigrants are a revitalizing force for our country. The lack of a just, humane and effective reform of immigration laws negatively affects the common good of the entire United States.

It pains and saddens us that many of our Catholic brothers and sisters have not supported our petitions for changes in the immigration law that will protect your basic rights while you contribute your hard work to our country. We promise to keep working to bring about this change. We know how difficult the journey is to reach the border and to enter the United States. That is why we are committed to do all that we can to bring about a change in the immigration law, so that you can enter and remain here legally and not feel compelled to undertake a dangerous journey in order to support and provide for your families. As pastors concerned for your welfare, we ask you to consider seriously whether it is advisable to undertake the journey here until after just and humane changes occur in our immigration laws.

Nevertheless, we are not going to wait until the law changes to welcome you who are already here into our churches, for as St. Paul tells us, "You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow-citizens with the holy people of God and part of God's household" (Eph 2:19).

As members of the Body of Christ which is the Church, we offer you spiritual nourishment. Feel welcome to Holy Mass, the Eucharist, which nourishes us with the word and the body and blood of Jesus. We offer you catechetical programs for your children and those religious education programs that our diocesan resources allow us to put at your disposal.

We who are citizens and permanent residents of this country cannot forget that almost all of us, we or our ancestors, have come from other lands and together with immigrants from various nations and cultures, have formed a new nation. Now we ought to open our hearts and arms to the recently arrived, just as Jesus asks us to do when he says, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was an alien and you took me into your house" (Mt 25:35). These words of the Lord Jesus can be applied to the new immigrants among us. They were hungry in their land of origin; they were thirsty as they traveled through the deserts, and they find themselves among us as aliens. (See Daniel G. Groody, CSC, "Crossing the Line," in

The Way, Vol. 43., No. 2, April 2004, p. 58-69). Their presence challenges us to be more courageous in denouncing the injustices they suffer. In imitation of Jesus and the great prophets we ought to denounce the forces that oppress them and announce the good news of the Kingdom with our works of charity. Let us pray and struggle to make it possible for these brothers and sisters of ours to have the same opportunities from which we have benefitted.

We see Jesus the pilgrim in you migrants. The Word of God migrated from heaven to earth in order to become man and save humanity. Jesus emigrated with Mary and Joseph to Egypt, as a refugee. He migrated from Galilee to Jerusalem for the sacrifice of the cross, and finally he emigrated from death to life in the resurrection and ascension to heaven. Today, he continues to journey and accompany all migrants on pilgrimage throughout the world in search of food, work, dignity, security and opportunities for the welfare of their families.

You reveal to us the supreme reality of life: we are all migrants. Your migration gives a strong and clear message that we are migrants on the way to eternal life. Jesus accompanies all Christians on our journey toward the house of our Father, God's Kingdom in heaven. (See Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, No. 50.)

We urge you not to despair. Keep faith in Jesus the migrant who continues to walk beside you. Have faith in Our Lady of Guadalupe who constantly repeats to us the words she spoke to St. Juan Diego, "Am I, who am your mother, not here?" She never abandons us, nor does St. Joseph who protects us as he did the Holy Family during their emigration to Egypt.

As pastors we want to continue to do advocacy for all immigrants. With St. Paul we say to you: "Do not be mastered by evil; but master evil with good." (Rm 12:21).

May Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, accompany you and bless you always.

Sincerely in Christ our Savior,

The Hispanic/Latino Bishops of the United States

Most Rev. José H. Gómez
Archbishop of Los Angeles

Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS
Archbishop of San Antonio

Most Rev. Gerald R. Barnes
Bishop of San Bernardino

Most Rev. Alvaro Corrada del Rio, SJ
Apostolic Administrator of Tyler
Bishop of Mayaguez, PR

Most Rev. Felipe de Jesús Estevez
Bishop of St. Augustine

Most Rev. Richard J. García
Bishop of Monterey

Most Rev. Armando X. Ochoa
Apostolic Administrator of El Paso
Bishop-designate of Fresno

Most Rev. Plácido Rodríguez, CMF
Bishop of Lubbock

Most Rev. James A. Tamayo
Bishop of Laredo

Most Rev. Raymundo J. Peña
Bishop Emeritus of Brownsville

Most Rev. Arthur Tafoya
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Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores
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Most Rev. Fernando Isern, D.D.
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Most Rev. Ricardo Ramírez,
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Most Rev. Jaime Soto
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Most Rev. Joe S. Vásquez
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Most Rev. Carlos A. Sevilla, SJ
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Most Rev. Oscar Cantú, S.T.D.
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Most Rev. Arturo Cepeda
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Most Rev. Manuel A. Cruz
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Most Rev. Rutilio del Riego
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Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S
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Most Rev. Francisco González , S.F.
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Most Rev. Eduardo A. Nevares
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Most Rev. Alexander Salazar
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Most Rev. David Arias, OAR
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Most Rev. Octavio Cisneros, DD
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Most. Rev. Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV
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Most Rev. Cirilo B. Flores
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Most Rev. Josu Iriondo
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Most Rev. Alberto Rojas
Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago

Most Rev. Luis Rafael Zarama
Auxiliary Bishop of Atlanta

Most Rev. Gabino Zavala
Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles

*Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe
December 12, 2011*