

My Dear Friends in Christ,

The Catholic Church globally, including this Archdiocese locally, has consistently and outspokenly urged all nations to protect the lives and dignities of migrants and to establish orderly immigration systems. For too long now, the crisis of migrants having to flee dire poverty and appalling violence around the world has sadly not improved. Nor, it seems, has many nations' ability to respond in a compassionate and orderly fashion. There are so many social concerns that trouble the conscience of the Church right now, such as abortion, gun violence and the state of the environment to name a few. But I write again on this concern of immigration for two main reasons:

First, we are relentlessly experiencing the dehumanizing impact of our own nation's broken immigration system in many of our parishes, schools, social services, and communities. Each day we see our own families being separated, traumatized children from the border coming to us for help, local refugee communities unable to bring their loved ones out of refugee camps elsewhere, and the lives of our neighbors devastated by human trafficking. For us, the issue is personal.

Secondly, as our country devolves into an increasingly polarized culture, migrants are God's gift to remind us that we are one body in Christ. As we so tragically saw in El Paso, fear and hatred of immigrants are driving people to indiscriminately kill their neighbors. Our own salvation, however, is steeped in our hearts' desires to unify humanity in God's love. And, among other tests in our daily lives, this is being measured by our willingness to respond to the extreme needs of those coming to our nation's doorstep, like Lazarus crawling to the rich man's house (Lk 16:19-31) and like the Holy Family seeking shelter from Herod's persecution (Mt 2:13-23). In every migrant seeking freedom from persecution, can we imagine ourselves in their footsteps? Can we see in them the face of Christ?

For these reasons, I reaffirm our call to all Catholics and people of goodwill to take action. I encourage us again to tell the Administration and Congress to prioritize the lives and dignities of migrants and to restore order to our broken immigration system.

A fundamental challenge of our modern-day immigration system is that there are simply too few legal and orderly paths for migrants to come here to begin with. Over the last several months, policies have been suggested and enacted that, unfortunately, are making the situation even worse. Several efforts aim to drastically restrict our country's asylum policies, limiting people's lawful right to seek refuge and protection in our country. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recently exclaimed, "It is contrary to American and Christian values to attempt to prevent people from migrating here when they are fleeing to save their lives and to find safety for their families."

Another threat that is being discussed in our government is reducing to zero the number of refugees permitted into our country in 2020. Our country has historically welcomed tens of thousands of refugees every year. In fact, since World War II the U.S. has welcomed more refugees than any other country - over two million people have proudly become part of the diverse fabric of American life. In the last 25 years, the refugee ceiling has hovered around

80,000, but in 2017 the number was dropped to 50,000; in 2018 it was dropped to 45,000, and this year it is set at 30,000. Bishop Joe Vasquez, Chair of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Migration, points out that "This recent report, if true, is disturbing and against the principles we have as a nation and a people. The world is in the midst of the greatest humanitarian displacement crisis in almost a century..."

Eliminating the refugee resettlement program leaves refugees in harm's way and keeps their families separated across continents." Rather than ending the program, the U.S. Bishops are urging us to restore the program to its historic norms of an annual resettlement goal of 95,000."

I strongly encourage you to reach out to your elected officials, especially those in the U.S. Congress, and demand that they take comprehensive action to fix our broken immigration system. As Cardinal DiNardo writes, "a just solution to this humanitarian crisis should focus on addressing the root causes that compel families to flee and enacting a humane reform of our immigration system." The Archdiocese is making available letters which you can sign and send to our elected officials at www.catholiccincinnati.org/socialaction.

I also entreat you to pray and to support the ministries of Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio (www.ccswoh.org) and Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley (www.cssmv.org), which regularly serve the needs of countless vulnerable populations in our Archdiocese, including migrants and refugees.

Thank you for your openness to this appeal. May our merciful response to make our nation more just both for current U.S. citizens and for those seeking a new life here reflect our eternal desire to be unified in the Body of Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ, Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr Archbishop of Cincinnati

USCCB Letter from Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, 7/16 - <http://www.usccb.org/news/2019/19131.cfm>

USCCB Letter from Bishop Joe Vasquez, 7/19 - <http://www.usccb.org/news/2019/19-134.cfm>

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilingsand-number-refugees-admitted-united>

Local statements on immigration and other critical issues of human life and dignity can be found at the "Where We Stand" page at www.catholiccincinnati.org. Additional positions on statewide matters can be found at www.ohiocathconf.org.