

September 21, 2023



Statement on the Status of Immigration in Washington State and the U.S.

"For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, a stranger and you made me welcome. Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:35-40

For many years, Catholics across this country have been at the forefront of efforts to welcome newcomers of all faiths and nationalities. As Christians, we are called to see the face of Christ in those who suffer and those who lack the basic necessities of life, and we judge ourselves as a community of faith by the way we treat the most vulnerable among us. We are each bound by a universal call to serve one another and to protect the sanctity of human life in all its forms. As Pope Francis reminds us, "The world exists for everyone, because all of us were born with the same dignity . . . As a community, we have an obligation to ensure that every person lives with dignity and has sufficient opportunities for his or her integral development." (*Fratelli tutti* 118)

There is a national consensus that the U.S. immigration system is severely flawed and in need of a comprehensive overhaul. However, the continued stalemate on enacting comprehensive immigration reform as national policy has created a void filled by short-term initiatives subject to the preferences of political parties in authority and an inconsistent network of state laws. Current deportation and enforcement efforts, as well as plans to reinforce our physical borders, have neither been effective nor a sustainable means of addressing this international humanitarian crisis. This disappointing reality continues to complicate efforts of law enforcement, sow discord in our communities, and harm vulnerable people. We urge legislators to engage in comprehensive reform, and at the same time we welcome incremental improvements to address needs as quickly as possible.

The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of speaking on the right to migrate. We embrace the five principles outlined in the pastoral letter *Strangers No Longer*, which capture the Church's teachings on migration: 1) persons have the right to find opportunities in their homeland, 2) persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families, 3) sovereign nations have the right to control their borders, 4) refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection, and 5) the human dignity and human rights of undocumented migrants should be respected (33-38). As stated by Pope St. John Paul II, our faith also compels us to be "vigilant advocates, defending against any unjust restriction on the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another" and to call attention "to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration" (*Ecclesia in America*, no. 65, 1999). Pope Francis also has stated that "safe, orderly, regular and sustainable migration is in the interest of all countries" (Address to Refugees Arriving in Europe through Humanitarian Corridors..., 2023).

As Catholics, we believe that each person, regardless of legal status, is a sister or brother in Jesus Christ. We are called to practice Christian charity and to protect and defend the dignity of every human person, especially the poor and most vulnerable based on the moral natural law. We are "obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal

fulfillment. Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate.” (*Fratelli tutti* 129). We must continue to strive for comprehensive immigration reform that honors the dignity of those seeking a better life in the United States, while also addressing the legitimate need for safe and secure borders.

For many decades, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has been at the forefront of working for comprehensive immigration reform. United with all U.S. bishops, the bishops of Washington state continue to safeguard and maintain the well-being of those entrusted to our care. We remain committed to supporting the efforts ongoing within our dioceses and the general community to promote the God-given dignity of every person, including those who have recently arrived in our communities. Further, as a Church committed to the common good, we always cooperate in the administration of humanitarian aid with local, state, and federal officials, frequently in partnership with faith communities and like-minded secular organizations. Catholics can learn more about current immigration advocacy opportunities and USCCB efforts by visiting the [Justice for Immigrants](#) website. We commend all these efforts to prayer, entrusting these works of mercy to Our Lady of Guadalupe as a source of unity throughout the Americas. May each of us be blessed with a humanitarian heart that beats with fraternal compassion for those in need.

We also commend the work of parishes and Catholic Charities who are walking alongside our migrant brothers and sisters on their journey. Examples of their work in our state include:

1. Parish immigration ministries, including [Welcome Circles](#), which are groups of parishioners who support recent arrivals and refugees from Latin America and those fleeing the war in Ukraine.
2. Summer outreach ministries to migrant workers and their families, including weekly Masses at work camps, reading programs for children, and sacramental preparation for adults.
3. Specialized programming for immigrants administered by Catholic Community Services and Catholic Charities including legal services in [western](#) and [eastern](#) Washington, [International Foster Care](#) for unaccompanied minors, the [Catholic Farmworker Center](#), and administration of time-limited grants that provide direct assistance to farm working families and to parish ministries that support those who recently arrived from the border and other parts of the world.
4. Individual Catholics who open their homes to temporarily host a migrant until they find their own housing.

Finally, we call upon the Catholic faithful and all people of goodwill to work together to seek solutions for this critical issue. We can do this not as strangers or adversaries but as sisters and brothers, considering all, including migrants, as having equal dignity and worth before the Lord.

In the Heart of Christ,



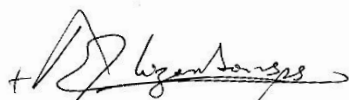
Most Rev. Paul D. Etienne
Archbishop of Seattle



Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson
Bishop of Yakima



Most Rev. Thomas A. Daly
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Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S.
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Most Rev. Frank Schuster
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