



Bishop Erik Pohlmeier Calls for a Just and Hopeful Response to Immigration

February 14, 2025

I am deeply grateful to the Holy Father for his thoughtful letter to the bishops and faithful of the United States (Feb. 11, 2025), acknowledging the major crisis our nation faces regarding immigration. His words remind us that policies built on force rather than truth ultimately fail to uphold human dignity and create division rather than solutions. As Catholics, we are called to respond not with fear but with faith, hope and love.

Our Holy Father encourages us to be mindful of how we speak about and respond to immigration. It is easy in times of uncertainty to rely on strong rhetoric to express concerns about security, stability and lawfulness. Every nation has a duty to protect its people, but we must also recognize that the vast majority of those seeking a better life in the United States are not criminals but families fleeing desperate circumstances.

Immigration enforcement is necessary for our country, as every nation has a duty to uphold the rule of law and ensure security. The U.S. bishops have long recognized this reality, consistently calling for immigration reform that balances enforcement with justice and compassion. A well-regulated system is essential, but it must also respect human dignity and provide clear legal pathways for those seeking a better future. As Catholics, we are called to approach this issue not only as citizens but as disciples of Christ, ensuring that our laws and policies reflect both the need for order and the Gospel's call to welcome the stranger.

The Holy Father has also called for 2025 to be a **Jubilee Year of Hope**, reminding us that hope is at the heart of our faith. In a time of fear and division, hope compels us to seek solutions rooted in Christ's love. It challenges us to see beyond political divides, recognize the dignity of every person and work for policies that uphold both justice and mercy. Many of our parishioners—faithful Catholics who care deeply about their country—are struggling with concerns about immigration. Others, particularly in our Hispanic communities, are living in fear, uncertain of what the future holds for them and their families. As a church, we recognize these concerns and want to speak directly to you, our brothers and sisters in faith, who feel anxious and afraid. You are not alone. The church is here to support you, walk with you and remind you that hope is stronger than fear.

We have received calls from members of our community who are concerned that Catholic Charities is illegally helping migrants cross the border or failing to uphold U.S. immigration laws. This is simply not true. Catholic Charities and other church ministries provide humanitarian assistance within the confines of U.S. federal law, seeking to uphold the Gospel by offering shelter, food, legal aid and resources to help migrants navigate the proper legal

channels. The church does not advocate open borders but for a just and humane immigration system that balances the rule of law with the dignity of every person. The current system often leaves migrants in legal limbo for years, preventing them from fully participating in society. A nation committed to the rule of law must ensure that its laws are just and workable, providing clear legal pathways for those seeking to contribute to our nation.

For decades, the Catholic Church in the United States has played a vital role in resettling refugees and assisting migrants through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, a partnership that ensures those fleeing persecution receive thorough vetting, cultural support and an opportunity to rebuild their lives. Since 1980, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has received government funding to carry out this important resettlement work, and Catholic Charities Bureau in the Diocese of St. Augustine has been serving refugees since 1982. Many people do not realize that the refugees we serve are identified and vetted by the U.S. government, a process that has remained consistent across both Democratic and Republican administrations for 45 years.

Catholic Charities is not profiting from this work; rather, it relies on both public and private support to fulfill its mission of serving the vulnerable. Immigration is an issue that stirs strong emotions and concerns, but it also directly affects members of our own parish communities—our true brothers and sisters in faith who now live in fear. As a church, we must acknowledge these realities and offer reassurance to those who are uncertain. The church’s mission is not political but pastoral: to provide guidance, support and care to all who need it.

A Just and Humane Immigration System Must Prioritize

The following principles are drawn from “Catholic Elements of Immigration Reform,” a document from the U.S. bishops’ Department of Migration and Refugee Services. These priorities reflect the church’s longstanding commitment to a just and humane immigration system that upholds both security and human dignity:

- **Targeted, proportional and humane enforcement** – Immigration policies should protect national security while respecting human dignity, avoiding excessive detentions and family separations.
- **Due process and humanitarian protections** – Refugees, asylum-seekers and victims of violence must have access to protection and legal pathways to safety.
- **A pathway to citizenship for longtime residents** – Millions of undocumented individuals, including Dreamers and essential workers, contribute to society and deserve the opportunity to seek legal status.
- **Family unity as a cornerstone of immigration policy** – Immigration laws should strengthen families not separate them.
- **Expanded and reliable legal pathways** – A just immigration system must offer accessible and efficient legal channels for those seeking work, safety and family reunification.

- **Addressing the root causes of forced migration** – The church calls for international cooperation to resolve the economic, political and environmental crises driving migration.

An Invitation to Reflect and Act as People of Faith

In the Diocese of St. Augustine, we recognize that immigration is a complex issue that stirs strong emotions, especially in a time of national uncertainty. Many Catholics rightly desire a secure and orderly immigration system, and the church affirms the duty of a nation to protect its citizens. At the same time, our Holy Father calls us to reflect on how we respond to those who are vulnerable and fearful. Are our laws applied with justice and mercy? Are we seeing the human dignity of migrants before we see their legal status? Are we treating families, especially children, in a way that honors our Catholic values?

This is not about political division but about the challenge of living out our faith with authenticity. Pope Francis asks us not to give in to narratives that cause unnecessary suffering. As Catholics, we must bring our faith into every aspect of our lives, including how we view and speak about immigration. Let us pray for wisdom, for our leaders and for solutions that respect both the rule of law and the dignity of everyone.

The Jubilee Year of Hope calls us to place our trust in Christ and to act with hope that transforms hearts and communities. May we take to heart Christ's words: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas, intercede for all who seek safety and a better future.



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