

***RENEWING HOPE, SEEKING JUSTICE***

**National Migration Conference**

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**Washington, DC**

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**Archbishop of Los Angeles**

I would like to thank Bishop John Wester for his introduction and his leadership on so many important social justice matters, especially migration. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' work on behalf of migrants and refugees is in good hands with your leadership.

I also would like to recognize the leadership of Bishop Jaime Soto of Sacramento, a fellow Californian, who is the chair of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC). We are grateful to have his leadership, both in California and on the national level.

I extend a special thanks to Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, for his ongoing guidance to us on the issue of migration and for traveling from Rome for this event.

I also welcome and thank His Eminence Cardinal Edward Egan, the Archbishop of New York for his presence and participation in this conference.

And, I would like to offer my sincere gratitude to His Eminence Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop emeritus of Washington, D.C., who throughout his lifelong ministry has worked tirelessly on behalf of newcomers to the Church and to this great land of America. And to Archbishop Donald Wuerl, the Archbishop of Washington, D.C., whose schedule did not permit him to be with us tonight, for his wonderful hospitality in hosting the Conference here in the Archdiocese of Washington.

I would like to speak with you this evening about the decision our nation is facing regarding immigration to this country and how the Church—and those of you who help perform her good works—can help guide our nation in taking the right path.

We are in a dark moment in our nation's history with regard to immigrants, refugees, and newcomers to our land. The failure of comprehensive immigration reform legislation just over a year ago emboldened some of our elected officials to pursue a punitive approach, using enforcement as both an immigration policy and a political tool.

As many of you know from your work, we and the immigrants we serve are facing enforcement raids, state and local enforcement actions, heightened border enforcement and the construction of a border wall, as well as lengthy stays in detention—all at great human and financial cost. These enforcement policies have led, in many cases, to the separation of families, the harassment and profiling of United States citizens and legal residents, the expanded use of detention against those who are not a flight risk or a danger and, tragically, deaths in the United States desert.

We have also seen attempts to stifle the Church's mission through proposals to criminalize those who strive to serve the basic human needs of migrants. A human being's worth is defined by their God-given dignity, not by what papers they carry.

These are the ingredients of a recipe known as deportation-by-attribution: Its goal is to create such a dangerous and unwelcoming atmosphere so that immigrants and their families leave the United States because they have no other choice. These various efforts have led to fear in our immigrant communities and to the creation of a negative atmosphere against all immigrants, fanning the flames of intolerance, xenophobia, and, at times, bigotry. And, as we have seen, these punitive efforts have not solved the challenge of illegal immigration in our country; they are not the answer to our broken immigration system. Such a national policy is doomed to fail because it underestimates the human spirit, the spirit of hope that we celebrate in this gathering.

Enforcement policies have not been limited to the area of immigration, however. In the area of refugee protection we have seen a retreat from America's traditional role of providing safe haven to those fleeing persecution. Refugees admitted to the United States have fallen drastically since 9/11, despite the implementation of onerous security precautions.

The charge of providing "material support" to groups on U.S. terror lists has denied *bona fide* refugees entry into our country and safety from their persecutors. Upon their arrival to our shores, asylum-seekers from around the world are faced with detention or immediate return to

their tormentors under a policy of expedited removal. We see this most prominently in the case of Haitians, but other groups are affected as well.

In the area of human trafficking, our nation has made significant progress, yet more must be done. Too many victims, especially children, have yet to be discovered and offered the care and protection they deserve.

Even our nation's historical ability to integrate newcomers into American society rapidly and in large numbers—a hallmark of our republic—is in serious jeopardy. High application fees and long waiting times are making citizenship out of reach for many potential Americans.

I realize that I am painting a somewhat bleak picture, but all is not lost. We have the opportunity, a long historical commitment, and the needed skills to help reverse these unfortunate developments and improve—and, in some cases, reform—these policies. I think the question for our Church and others of good will, and the question for all of us at this Conference is: How? How can the Church reframe the debate on immigration in this country? What steps must we take as a faith community to ensure that the rights of immigrants, refugees, and other newcomers continue to be protected in the United States of America?

In addressing these questions, I would like to focus on “renewing hope,” part of the theme of our gathering this week. It is a theme that is recurrent in our ministry to migrants, who risk their lives in the hope of pursuing a better life. It can be seen in the eyes of the immigrant traveling to our land, the refugee preparing for resettlement, the trafficking victim who has been

rescued, or the permanent resident taking the oath of citizenship. It was seen and realized by the first newcomers to Ellis Island.

The act of migration is at its heart a hopeful act, an act that a better life, more befitting of human dignity, is possible for the migrant and his or her family. It is hopeful in the sense that migrants, in giving of themselves to others, are becoming who God calls them to be. Most migrants are self-sacrificing people whose commitment to values like faith, family, and work can help evangelize a culture and individuals who do not always treat them as fully human.

The word “hope” resonates among us gathered this week and provides us a guiding light in our ongoing journey with the migrant. The Conference theme, “Renewing Hope, Seeking Justice,” appropriately sets the tone for our gathering. The landmark pastoral letter of the U.S. and Mexican Bishops, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, offers us a framework for fulfilling the hope of immigrants and their families. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has reminded us—both in his encyclical *Spe Salvi* (“Saved by Hope”) and in the theme of his recent apostolic visit to our country, “Christ our Hope”—that hope is central to the life of the Church.

Indeed, our ultimate hope lies in the life, words, and deeds of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is He who gives us the strength to continue our struggle.

The life of Christ gives us the guidance we need to respond to the migrant in His name, even in the face of criticism of our actions and efforts. Indeed, while on earth Christ Himself

was an itinerant preacher, with “no place to rest his head” (Matthew 8:20). Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were refugees, fleeing the terror of Herod into Egypt.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches us to “welcome the stranger” because “whatever you did for one of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). This is perhaps the central Gospel passage guiding the work and teaching of the Church toward the migrant. But we also find truth in how Christ interacted with others, particularly those who were not welcome in society or cast aside to the margins of the social, political, and economic systems of His day.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-42). As you are likely aware, Samaritans were considered a lower class in Judea, persons with whom many Jews would not associate. And women were considered lower on the social scale. So, in engaging the woman, Jesus was performing a transformative act, in which misguided social norms and ethnic differences were set aside to make room for a new law, God’s law, in which we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. The Samaritan woman is so moved that she proclaims that she has found the Messiah. We can learn from Christ’s life here. Like Him we are to welcome the stranger from another land, and, in so doing, spread the love of Christ and help transform the world.

But Jesus reached out to government authorities as well: He called upon tax collectors like Zaccheus and Matthew to follow him; raised the daughter of the Roman soldier from the dead; and forgave those who nailed Him to the cross. So, too, must we reach out to government

authorities—legislative and administrative—involved in the migration process, and work toward mutual understanding and reconciliation.

In his encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, our Holy Father speaks to the meaning of hope, born in Christ, and how Christian hope is realized through perseverance and action, but not without suffering. His message is applicable to the struggle that the immigrant—as well as the Church welcoming the immigrant—faces today.

In his encyclical, the Holy Father points to the presence of suffering in the world—because of our sin—and how we must express hope by working for justice and the reduction of suffering. “It is however, hope—not yet fulfillment; hope that gives us the courage to place ourselves on the side of the good even in seemingly hopeless situations, aware that, as far as the external course of history is concerned, the power of sin will continue to be a terrible presence.” (*Spe Salvi*, no. 36) So, in these days of enforcement raids and anti-immigrant sentiment in our nation, we must not be distraught and discouraged by the suffering and injustice we see, but strengthen ourselves to alleviate it and find the hope to move beyond it.

Consequently, hope involves action. The Holy Father continues: “All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action. This is so first of all in the sense that we thereby strive to realize our lesser and greater hopes, to complete this or that task which is important for our onward journey, or we work towards a brighter and more humane world so as to open doors into the future” (*Spe Salvi*, no. 35).

Thus, hope is not wishing for something without working for it. In the context of our current struggle, we must continue to work to realize the hope of a more just immigration and refugee protection system, or, as the Holy Father says, a “brighter and more humane world.” In “seeking justice,” the second part of our Conference theme, we help bring about this reality.

In order for hope to be fully realized, however, we must have faith—faith in God but also faith in our own best efforts. As the Holy Father points out at the beginning of his encyclical, hope is faith; faith is hope. Despite the attacks on our position and on those we serve, we must not lose faith as to the rightness of our cause and of our service to our immigrant brothers and sisters. The Church must remain a prophetic voice in an increasingly hostile wilderness, defending her mandate, given by Christ, to welcome the stranger.

This is why the theme of the National Migration Conference 2008—“Renewing Hope, Seeking Justice”—captures so well what we must focus upon in our gathering. It incorporates the action needed, “seeking justice,” to realize our renewed hope of changing our immigration system and the lives of millions of our fellow human beings and generations to come.

But how do we do that, you ask? What must the Church—what must you and I—do to change the current situation for the better?

Let me offer a few suggestions:

First, we must speak clearly and often to the migrants and refugees who are in our midst or who are coming to our country: you can count on the Roman Catholic Church to stand with

you and to walk with you on your journey to legal status in the United States—something we have done decade after decade, century after century since the founding of our country. You can count on us to work tirelessly to make certain that your God-given rights as human beings are granted and protected. Our immigrant brothers and sisters: we will not allow mean-spirited rhetoric deter us in our commitment to you.

Second, we must hold accountable those who are asking for our votes this November. We must insist that they outline a humane plan for reform of our immigration laws, that they refrain from demagoguery and anti-immigrant rhetoric, and that they educate the voters on the need to repair a broken system.

I call upon the two presidential candidates—Senator John McCain and Senator Barack Obama—to engage in a civil discussion on how we must reform our nation’s immigration laws in a fair and humane fashion. I call upon them to remind all Americans of our wondrous immigrant history, and how immigrant peoples have helped make this nation great. I call upon them to pledge to make comprehensive immigration reform one of their highest priorities in early 2009 and to work with Congress to enact it.

Third, we must change attitudes toward migrants through ongoing education. Many of those who are not welcoming towards immigrants and who work against immigration reform are Catholic: we must change their hearts and address their misunderstandings and their fears. We must make a renewed effort through the Justice for Immigrants campaign to educate Catholics

and others as to the realities of immigration. Educating Catholics and others makes them less likely to scapegoat immigrants or to use harsh rhetoric against them.

Fourth, we must continue to provide pastoral care and social services, including legal assistance, to migrants and their families. The Church is the first, and sometimes last, refuge for the newcomer, many of whom are Catholic. Migrants and their families must be aware that the Church will meet their spiritual and material needs, no matter where they are on their migration journey. We must not let attacks on the mission of the Church toward migrants—in the form of legislative proposals or rhetoric—deter us.

Fifth, we must work toward the reform of laws impacting migrants, immigrants, and refugees. We must use the failure of the past battles as knowledge to win the ultimate victory. This can occur in the next two years, provided we work hard toward this end and start doing so now. Many of you will be joining this effort by participating in Advocacy Day on Wednesday.

While we are bound to respect our laws and not violate them, we also are bound to correct unjust laws. In this regard, we must advocate for an enforcement regime which respects basic human dignity and human rights. The terms “rule of law” and “national security” should no longer be used to justify the harsh and inhumane treatment of immigrants, refugees, or asylum-seekers. While we acknowledge the right and the need for our government to enforce the law, we must remind our fellow Americans that man-made law does not permit the violation of God’s law. And by repairing the law, we are better able to enforce it in a humane manner.

In addition, I would like to draw special attention to two areas of migration policy in which the Church has special authority to speak: family unity and the root causes of migration. They are common threads in all issues of migration—refugee protection, immigration, human trafficking, and others.

These are themes the Holy Father addressed during his recent apostolic visit to the United States. With regard to the root causes of migration, the Church, a universal institution present in both sending and receiving countries, can provide special expertise. Sustainable economic development is the Church's answer to border walls. It takes away the market from human traffickers, who lure victims with promises of jobs in the developed world. It reduces the number of refugees, since wars and conflicts often involve a battle over resources.

We must strive for the day on which human beings can remain in their homelands and live and support their families in dignity. Governments should pursue economic policies and practices that make the need for their citizens to cross borders less compelling and necessary. As the world's economic superpower, the United States should assist these governments or, at a minimum, not make it more difficult for them to reach this goal.

The Church must also protect the family unit, especially in the context of migration, since families are often separated, sometimes indefinitely. Families should be able to remain together despite their legal status or circumstances and our laws should be tailored toward that goal. This is true of the undocumented migrant who has left their family behind in the home country, the

trafficking victim isolated from family, or the refugee or unaccompanied minor separated from their family during war.

Finally, we ourselves must not lose hope. It may be helpful here to recall the basic, fundamental “structure of hope.” Hope always moves in three steps. First: What I hope for I do not yet have; hope is always for some future good. Second: What I hope for may be difficult; hope strains, searches, struggles. But, Third: What I hope for can come to be; it is possible. At times it is easy to forget that—even as we work and not merely wish—what we hope for lies in God’s hands. It can only come to us as a gift. The only danger we face is losing hope. It must be our daily prayer that we remain open to receive the hope that can only come to us as a gift. And then pass this hope on for the life of the world. The Church must remain a source of hope for all those who seek protection or search for a better life for themselves and their families.

We can achieve these goals with faith in God, our ultimate hope, by giving witness to Christ who welcomed the stranger, whether the lame, the blind, the hungry, the thirsty, or the Samaritan woman. In *Spe Salvi*, the Holy Father reminds us: “So on one hand, our actions engender hope for us and others; but at the same time, it is the great hope based upon God’s promises that gives us courage and directs our action in good times and bad” (no. 35).

I would like to close by expressing my deep appreciation for the work you do on behalf of newcomers to our land. I know that in your day-to-day jobs you face moments in which problems seem daunting and the benefits to the people you serve seem minimal. Without the light you provide to these vulnerable persons, however, the world would be even darker for

them. Whether you are the parish employee responding to an enforcement action, as we have seen in Postville, New Bedford, and other places; a refugee resettlement specialist working to find housing or employment for a new arrival; an attorney seeking ways to prevent the deportation of a client; a priest, religious, or lay person offering pastoral assistance; or a social action director or public policy advocate meeting with a public official, know that your work is invaluable---indispensable—in saving lives and creating a “brighter and more humane world,” as the Holy Father puts it, for our fellow human beings. In many ways, you are the fulfillment of the hope in their eyes.

I will leave you with the words of Pope Benedict XVI, this time given during his apostolic visit to the United States in April. He spoke these words to the U.S. Bishops, but he also was speaking to the entire country. They reaffirm the importance of your work and how the Church must remain in solidarity with the migrant. They also speak to the spirit of America, our great country, a land that is and always will remain a land of immigrants:

Brother bishops, I want to encourage you and your communities to continue to welcome the immigrants who join your ranks today, to share their joys and hopes, to support them in their sorrow and trials, and to help them flourish in their new home. This, indeed, is what your fellow countrymen have done for generations. From the beginning, they have opened their doors to the tired, the poor, the ‘huddled masses yearning to breathe free.’ These are the people who America has made her own. [end quote]

Confident in our cause and with hope as our guardian and faith our constant companion, we will soon win justice for all of our brothers and sisters. May God bless you and keep you strong.