



DIocese of St. Petersburg
Office of the Bishop

Statement on the Immigration Crisis in the U.S.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Catholic Church recognizes the right of sovereign nations to control its borders and our Church also teaches that the basic human rights of each person should never be violated. That is why the images we have seen and the stories we have heard recently about immigrants arriving in our country, shock and sadden us to our core. There must be a better and more humane way to care for the migrants who are seeking refuge in our nation.

One year ago, I wrote about the border crisis in an op-ed that appeared in the *Tampa Bay Times*. What I said then, still rings true today: “Families are being traumatized in the name of border security, serving as pawns in a political game devoid of humanity and compassion. The country that they believed would protect them has torn their family apart and left them in a more perilous position than before.”

If you are an immigrant who lives in fear, regardless of your legal status, I want you to know that I stand in solidarity with you. You are my family in Christ. You are my neighbor whom Jesus has commanded me to love in the story of the Good Samaritan. All people, regardless of their country of origin or legal status, are made in the image of God and should be treated with dignity and respect. Recent reports of overcrowded and unsanitary conditions are appalling and unacceptable for any person in U.S. custody, but particularly for children, who are uniquely vulnerable. Such conditions cannot be used as tools of deterrence. We can and must remain a country that provides refuge for children and families fleeing violence, persecution, and acute poverty.

Pope Francis recently said, “The key of Christian life, is in one’s capacity to show compassion.” This calling to be compassionate is so relevant to us, as we witness the tragic immigration crisis unfolding at our southern border. We are called to act with compassion and courage. Our social teachings have long proclaimed the dignity of the human person and call us to a special solidarity with the most vulnerable. It is our sacred duty to protect and give voice to the defenseless - the unborn, the elderly, the disabled, the imprisoned, the immigrant, and the refugee.

Let us pray for those on a journey to live in freedom and peace, without fear of violence, persecution or hunger. Let us call on our elected officials to move beyond political posturing and work together on comprehensive immigration reform that respects due process. Measures should be taken to keep families together in the least restrictive environment possible. Congress must act swiftly to protect the dignity and basic human rights of men, women and children who have suffered so much. The Administration, likewise, should not attempt to force the hand of legislators through threats of enforcement actions (raids). Such actions do little if anything to protect American society and instead wreak fear in the hearts of undocumented persons and destabilize families and communities. Arbitrary and inhumane enforcement procedures exacerbate a humanitarian crisis and are beneath our nation’s dignity.

As a nation, we must choose to work together to enact just laws that will reform a broken system and protect the vulnerable.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend Gregory Parkes
Bishop of St. Petersburg