

Pope Francis supports U.S. Bishops in migrant advocacy

Pope Francis addresses a letter to the bishops of the United States, expressing his support for their efforts to protect the rights and dignity of migrants.

By Vatican News

In a letter dated 10 February 2025, and addressed to his brothers in the episcopate, Pope Francis acknowledges the work of U.S. bishops in standing alongside migrants and refugees, he expresses support for efforts to uphold the fundamental dignity of every human person and he highlights the importance of pastoral accompaniment for those facing displacement.

In his letter, the Pope recalls the Holy Family's flight into Egypt and draws a parallel between their experience and that of many migrants today. Their journey, he notes, shines the light on "the phenomenon of migration as a decisive moment in history" and reaffirms "not only our faith in God but also the infinite and transcendent dignity of every human person."

Highlighting Pope Pius XII's apostolic constitution on the Care of Migrants, which describes the Holy Family as a model for all who must leave their homeland in search of safety and stability, he writes "Your work in defending migrants is deeply rooted in the mission of Christ and the history of the Church."

Uphold human dignity

In his 10-point letter, the Holy Father says he has "followed closely the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations" and commends the bishops' efforts stressing that Christian love demands recognition of the dignity of all people, regardless of legal status.

Since taking office on 20 January, President Donald Trump has announced a series of immigration-related executive orders that pave the way for a widespread effort to crack down on undocumented migrants in the US. In more than 21 actions, Trump has moved

to overhaul parts of the US immigration system, including how migrants are processed and deported from the US.

The Pope acknowledges the complex realities surrounding U.S. migration policies but reminds the bishops that the measure of a just society is how it treats its most vulnerable members.

“The legitimate regulation of migration must never undermine the essential dignity of the person,” he writes.

The Pope also expresses appreciation for the bishops’ advocacy against narratives that criminalize migrants and emphasizes their role in ensuring that policies respect human rights.

“God will richly reward all that you do for the protection and defense of those who are considered less valuable, less important, or less human,” he says.

Strengthening the Church’s Mission

In light of the current challenges, Pope Francis urges the bishops to remain steadfast in their work, and despite the obstacles they face, including social and political pressures, he encourages them to continue promoting solidarity and compassion.

“Your pastoral ministry is a beacon of hope for many who feel abandoned and excluded,” he states.

Reaffirming the Church’s mission, the Pope calls on the bishops to lead by example in fostering an inclusive and just society.

“Through your witness, the faithful are reminded that true Christian identity is expressed in fraternity and the unwavering defense of human dignity,” he writes.

Prayer for strength and guidance

Pope Francis concludes his letter entrusting the bishops and the migrants they serve to the protection of Our Lady of Guadalupe: May she “grant us all to meet (...) as brothers and sisters, within her embrace, and thus take a step forward in the construction of a society that is more fraternal, inclusive and respectful of the dignity of all.”

Please find below the full text of Pope Francis' letter to the U.S. Bishops:

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

I am writing today to address a few words to you in these delicate moments that you are living as Pastors of the People of God who walk together in the United States of America.

1. The journey from slavery to freedom that the People of Israel traveled, as narrated in the Book of Exodus, invites us to look at the reality of our time, so clearly marked by the phenomenon of migration, as a decisive moment in history to reaffirm not only our faith in a God who is always close, incarnate, migrant and refugee, but also the infinite and transcendent dignity of every human person.[1]

2. These words with which I begin are not an artificial construct. Even a cursory examination of the Church's social doctrine emphatically shows that Jesus Christ is the true Emmanuel (cf. *Mt*1:23); he did not live apart from the difficult experience of being expelled from his own land because of an imminent risk to his life, and from the experience of having to take refuge in a society and a culture foreign to his own. The Son of God, in becoming man, also chose to live the drama of immigration. I like to recall, among other things, the words with which Pope Pius XII began his Apostolic Constitution on the Care of Migrants, which is considered the "Magna Carta" of the Church's thinking on migration:

"The family of Nazareth in exile, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, emigrants in Egypt and refugees there to escape the wrath of an ungodly king, are the model, the example and the consolation of emigrants and pilgrims of every age and country, of all refugees of every condition who, beset by persecution or necessity, are forced to leave their homeland, beloved family and dear friends for foreign lands."[2]

3. Likewise, Jesus Christ, loving everyone with a universal love, educates us in the permanent recognition of the dignity of every human being, without exception. In fact, when we speak of "infinite and transcendent dignity," we wish to emphasize that the most decisive value possessed by the human person surpasses and sustains every other juridical consideration that can be made to regulate life in society. Thus, all the Christian faithful and people of good will are called upon to consider the legitimacy of

norms and public policies in the light of the dignity of the person and his or her fundamental rights, not vice versa.

4. I have followed closely the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations. The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality. At the same time, one must recognize the right of a nation to defend itself and keep communities safe from those who have committed violent or serious crimes while in the country or prior to arrival. That said, the act of deporting people who in many cases have left their own land for reasons of extreme poverty, insecurity, exploitation, persecution or serious deterioration of the environment, damages the dignity of many men and women, and of entire families, and places them in a state of particular vulnerability and defenselessness.

5. This is not a minor issue: an authentic rule of law is verified precisely in the dignified treatment that all people deserve, especially the poorest and most marginalized. The true common good is promoted when society and government, with creativity and strict respect for the rights of all — as I have affirmed on numerous occasions — welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates the most fragile, unprotected and vulnerable. This does not impede the development of a policy that regulates orderly and legal migration. However, this development cannot come about through the privilege of some and the sacrifice of others. What is built on the basis of force, and not on the truth about the equal dignity of every human being, begins badly and will end badly.

6. Christians know very well that it is only by affirming the infinite dignity of all that our own identity as persons and as communities reaches its maturity. Christian love is not a concentric expansion of interests that little by little extend to other persons and groups. In other words: the human person is not a mere individual, relatively expansive, with some philanthropic feelings! The human person is a subject with dignity who, through the constitutive relationship with all, especially with the poorest, can gradually mature in his identity and vocation. The true *ordo amoris* that must be promoted is that which we discover by meditating constantly on the parable of the “Good Samaritan”

(cf. *Lk*10:25-37), that is, by meditating on the love that builds a fraternity open to all, without exception.[3]

7. But worrying about personal, community or national identity, apart from these considerations, easily introduces an ideological criterion that distorts social life and imposes the will of the strongest as the criterion of truth.

8. I recognize your valuable efforts, dear brother bishops of the United States, as you work closely with migrants and refugees, proclaiming Jesus Christ and promoting fundamental human rights. God will richly reward all that you do for the protection and defense of those who are considered less valuable, less important or less human!

9. I exhort all the faithful of the Catholic Church, and all men and women of good will, not to give in to narratives that discriminate against and cause unnecessary suffering to our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters. With charity and clarity we are all called to live in solidarity and fraternity, to build bridges that bring us ever closer together, to avoid walls of ignominy and to learn to give our lives as Jesus Christ gave his for the salvation of all.

10. Let us ask Our Lady of Guadalupe to protect individuals and families who live in fear or pain due to migration and/or deportation. May the “*Virgen morena*”, who knew how to reconcile peoples when they were at enmity, grant us all to meet again as brothers and sisters, within her embrace, and thus take a step forward in the construction of a society that is more fraternal, inclusive and respectful of the dignity of all.

Fraternally,

Francis

From the Vatican, 10 February 2025