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STATEMENT

Most Reverend John C. Wester's Statement on Human Dignity, Immigration, and the Gospel Call to Compassion

ALBUQUERQUE—Friday, February 6, 2026 —IMMEDIATE RELEASE—Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe, issued a statement on human dignity, immigration, and the Gospel call to compassion.

In recent days, we have witnessed Speaker of the House Mike Johnson publicly criticizing Pope Leo XIV's position of welcoming the stranger. While every person of faith and goodwill can, and should, engage in political debate regarding immigration policy, national borders, and the treatment of migrants, it is deeply concerning when theological language and sacred texts are used to diminish the fundamental dignity of human beings created in the image of God.

First, let us be clear: Catholic teaching does not advocate for “open borders” without order or due process. Pope Leo has affirmed that “every country has the right to determine who and how and when people enter” its territory and that nations are responsible for regulating their borders for the common good.

Yet this is only one part of the teaching. The pope also calls upon all of us to ask: how do we treat the human beings who come seeking refuge, work, or safety? He warns that treating migrants with disrespect, indignity, or violence, especially those who have lived peaceful lives for many years, is “extremely disrespectful” and deeply troubling.

Catholic social teaching recognizes the legitimate authority of governments and the right of states to manage their borders. But that right is never absolute. Laws and policies must always reflect the inherent dignity of every person, and must be ordered toward justice, mercy, and the common good. This is not weak idealism; it is the core of the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed: “I was a stranger, and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). A greater duty rests upon those with power to protect the vulnerable, not to treat them as political fodder.

To suggest that compassion, dignity, and respect for the stranger are merely personal virtues rather than obligations of society betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of Christian ethics. The Gospel is not a collection of sound bites for political advantage; it is the call to love our neighbors as ourselves, to defend the defenseless, and to remember that every human being bears the imprint of God. Reducing Scripture to a political tool undermines its transformative power and our shared humanity.

Every state has the right to regulate its borders, but that right must be balanced with the call to show compassion, protect human dignity, and seek just and humane solutions. Strong policies and humane treatment are not mutually exclusive; in fact, justice demands both.

Let us pray for our leaders that they may be guided by wisdom, informed by truth, and moved by the love and mercy of Christ, who came not to condemn, but to call us into communion with all people.

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