



UNITED BUILDING THE FUTURE WITH MIGRANTS

Message from the bishops of the Texas and Mexico border

INTRODUCTION

1. We give thanks to God for the 20th anniversary of the publication of the pastoral letter of the Catholic bishops of the United States and Mexico on migration, entitled **STRANGERS NO LONGER: TOGETHER ON THE JOURNEY OF HOPE**. Once again, the bishops from both sides of the border address the people of God, authorities, and people of good will. Enlightened by the Word of God contained in Sacred Scripture and in Sacred Tradition, with the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church, we wish to be able to look deeply at the reality that migrants face. Realizing that we are all sisters and brothers, may we find a way to walk together to build a better future together.
2. We acknowledge the right of sovereign states to control their borders in order to safeguard the common good of citizens and the entire human community, as well as the fundamental right of every person to migrate or not to migrate. Likewise, we maintain that the most prosperous nations have the duty to welcome, as soon as possible, foreigners who seek the security and livelihood that they cannot find in their country of origin, as well as to ensure the rights of migrants. In turn, migrants must gratefully respect the material and spiritual heritage of the country that welcomes them, obey its laws and contribute to its development.¹
3. We are aware that “America is a continent born of immigrant peoples who came to inhabit these lands and who from north to south gave birth to new civilizations.”² We ratify our conviction that “migration between our two nations is necessary and beneficial.”³ For this reason, we urge everyone to

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2241.

² *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*. A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States, no. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

create environments that make “welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants and refugees”⁴ possible, as Pope Francis has requested.

4. We share the dreams and sufferings of migrants. We know of the situations that force them to emigrate and the pain that this entails. We are aware of the multiple violations of their fundamental rights, as well as the poverty, injustices, violence, dangers, and abuses they suffer, both in their places of origin and in those of transit and destination.
5. Likewise, we are distressed that migrants are victims of criminal organizations, as well as the corruption and complicity of some authorities. We are concerned about human trafficking, forced displacement, detentions, and deportations without respect for the rights of those seeking international protection, the constant persecution and criminalization to which they are subjected, the lack of competent translators for the procedures to which they are subjects, discrimination, invisibility, loneliness, longing for the homeland, kidnapping, disappearance, and so many situations that afflict them.
6. We reiterate our solidarity with migrants and refugees, with pastoral workers and defenders of human rights, as well as with all those who become good Samaritans, putting themselves at the service of itinerant people. Although our work has been ongoing for a long time, in recent years it has been especially difficult, due to the arrival of thousands of migrants. The Catholic communities in Mexico and the United States have striven to provide social services, legal advice, counseling, as well as medical, spiritual, and other services, including psychological therapies, taking into account the diversity of traumatic situations that many of them have experienced.
7. The Church does not advocate for open borders, but rather for laws that respect basic human rights. Governments must create laws that include both a secure border and a humane immigration policy.⁵ We do not encourage illegal or undocumented migration, but rather advocate for legal pathways for migration.
8. We recognize the efforts of the authorities of both countries and ask them to continue working to establish fair laws, in addition to carrying out the

⁴ Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2018.

⁵ *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*. A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States, no. 38-39.

necessary actions to protect and defend the fundamental human rights of all people, regardless of their immigration status. For our part, we renew our commitment to continue in constant communication and collaboration with government agencies and entities at the local, state, and federal levels, to provide services that include information and legal defense, among others.

CHAPTER I

LOOKING AT MIGRATION

9. In 2020, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that there were nearly 281 million international migrants in the world, representing 3.6 percent of the world population.⁶ For its part, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs indicated that one in four international migrants worldwide resided in the Americas, which is equivalent to 73.5 million.⁷ The main destination region is North America, with the United States hosting the largest number of international migrants in the world, with almost 51 million.⁸ Around 8,000 people seeking asylum are arriving at the border daily. Lately, the majority have arrived from Venezuela and Nicaragua.
10. According to the annual Global Trends report of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2021 the number of people displaced by wars, violence, persecution, and human rights violations amounted to 89.3 million. That is 8 percent more compared to the previous year and more than double in relation to the figure 10 years ago.⁹ The caravans that migrants form to support themselves have highlighted the reality of this region. Added to this is the displacement caused by the drama of the war between Russia and Ukraine.
11. The IOM has considered the border between the United States and Mexico as the most dangerous land migratory route in the world, with a record of 686 migrants dead or missing along that dividing line in the year 2022.¹⁰ It is

⁶ World Migration Report 2022.

⁷ UN DESA, 2020.

⁸ IOM, World Migration Report 2022.

⁹ UNHCR, Global Trends Report 2021.

¹⁰ Statement, 12 September 2023.

estimated that, each year, around 300,000 people are victims of human trafficking in the state of Texas. The number of migrants who are rescued from the cargo trucks in which they were being transported is alarming. Unfortunately, many have died. Faced with this situation, the Catholic Church offers help through hospitals, hotels, and means of transportation, collaborating with consulates in many states of the country.

12. Mexico is a country of origin, transit, return, and destination of migrants. The Migration Policy, Registry, and Identity of Persons Unit (UPMRIP) of the Ministry of the Interior (SEGOB) indicates that from January to February 2023, 6.1 million entries to Mexico of foreign people were registered, which represented a 37.5 percent increase compared to the same period in 2022.¹¹ Many are fleeing injustice, poverty, violence, and natural disasters caused by climate change, seeking freedom, security, and the opportunity for a more dignified life.
13. The constitutional reform in Mexico on human rights in 2011, and the enactment of the Migration Law of the same year, do not consider irregular migration as a crime. However, the deprivation of liberty continues to occur for foreigners who are unable to present the proper documents. According to the records of the Migration Policy Unit of the Ministry of the Interior, in the first quarter of 2023, people from 125 countries were detained in the country. The detention of foreign migrants in Mexican territory has quintupled in the last decade, going from 88,000 in 2012 to 450 thousand in 2022.¹²
14. In Mexico, the regulation of the granting of political asylum, the recognition of refugee status, and the granting of complementary protection, are established in the Law on Refugees, Complementary Protection and Political Asylum, published in 2011. According to the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees (COMAR), the number of refugee applicants in Mexico during the first half of 2023 was 74,764 migrants, thus registering an increase of 28 percent compared to the same period in 2022, in which 58,238 applications were received.
15. The statistics provided by the Migration Policy Unit and the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees do not cover all the people in the context of human mobility in Mexico. Nor do they consider the number of victims of

¹¹ Statement No. 219/2023.

¹² Morning immigration card, 22 May 2023.

trafficking, smuggling of migrants, missing migrants, or people who, in the absence of policies, laws, and practices that would make migration more humane, decide to remain in hiding. All of this makes many migrants highly vulnerable to criminal organizations, which subject them to different forms of extortion and kidnapping, among other crimes.

16. Family separation has been used for many years and continues. The United States government has eliminated Title 42, as well as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for citizens of Cameroon, Ukraine, and Venezuela. Many humanitarian centers have been created in other countries, starting with Guatemala and Colombia.
17. The immigration policies implemented by the United States government and the detention and containment policy in Mexico have put migrants in situations of greater vulnerability, causing uncertainty, rejection, persecution, and violation of their human rights, exposing them to falling into the hands of criminal organizations as they attempt to reach their destination. The militarization of the southern border of the United States, and the northern and southern borders of Mexico, has included abuse of authority, arbitrary detentions, and separation of families. The condition of the places at the border commonly known as “*hieleras*” (coolers) is deplorable. There are constant reports of abuse, lack of food, and untreated illnesses. Unfortunately, these abuses or lack of care have led to the deaths of dozens of people who were in the custody of the American government.
18. Our pastoral agents, who heroically and with a Christian spirit are in solidarity with migrants, often face immigration policies that criminalize them. Likewise, they experience the anguish of seeing that resources are increasingly insufficient, as are reception spaces. Additionally, many have suffered threats and violence from criminal organizations. To all of them we express our recognition, solidarity, blessing, and encouragement.

CHAPTER II

DISCERNING MIGRATION

19. Our Catholic perspective on migrants and refugees is rooted in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, with the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church.¹³ The Bible talks about the experience of migration. For instance, the Book of Exodus says: “*You shall not oppress or afflict a resident alien, for you were once aliens residing in the land of Egypt*” (Ex 22:20). Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus temporarily emigrated to Egypt to escape the violent plans of King Herod (Mt 2:13-23). Jesus himself teaches that, by welcoming the stranger, we are actually welcoming him, who will say at the Final Judgment: “*I was a stranger and you welcomed me*” (Mt 25:35). “He who made the world wanted to be a pilgrim in the world,” says Saint Augustine. “He deigned to be a guest so that you would receive the blessing upon receiving him... He is among us in his members.”¹⁴ Jesus visits us in the migrants, who become our traveling companions. In them, we receive as a guest the one who prepares a house for us in heaven,¹⁵ which is our homeland.¹⁶
20. Throughout history, the Church, which like a mother has been attentive and solicitous to the problems of humanity, through its social doctrine has promoted and defended the natural and inalienable right of every human person to migrate or to not migrate.¹⁷ It has also recognized the right of states to control their borders, as well as their duty to welcome migrants and ensure their rights. Migrants, in turn must respect the material and spiritual heritage of the country that welcomes them, obey its laws, and contribute to its development.¹⁸
21. The Church teaches that all people have the right to find economic, political, and social opportunities in their own country, allowing them to achieve a dignified and fulfilling life. This requires that each country, through careful local or national administration, guarantee more equitable trade and solidarity-based international cooperation and ensure freedom of expression

¹³ *Dei verbum*, no. 10.

¹⁴ St. Augustine, Sermon 239, 2. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ St Augustine, Sermon 378.

¹⁷ Pius XII, *Exsul familia*, no. 61-62.

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2241.

and movement to its own inhabitants, as well as the possibility of satisfying their fundamental needs, such as food, health, work, housing, and education.¹⁹

22. “At the same time, greater efforts are needed,” as Pope Francis reminds us, “to guarantee the easing of conditions, often brought about by war or famine, which compel whole peoples to leave their native countries. Solidarity with migrants and refugees must be accompanied by the courage and creativity necessary to develop, on a world-wide level, a more just and equitable financial and economic order, as well as an increasing commitment to peace, the indispensable condition for all authentic progress.”²⁰
23. When the above does not happen, people are forced to leave their homes in the hope of finding peace and security elsewhere. “Ideally,” says the Holy Father, “unnecessary migration ought to be avoided; this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development. Yet until substantial progress is made in achieving this goal, we are obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfilment.”²¹
24. The Church recognizes the right of each individual to emigrate with the power to settle where they believe most appropriate for the better realization of their capabilities, aspirations and projects. “Regulating immigration according to criteria of equity and balance is one of the indispensable conditions for ensuring that immigrants are integrated into society with the guarantees required by recognition of their human dignity. Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life.”²²
25. Regardless of their legal status, the life, dignity, and rights of migrants must be recognized, respected, promoted, and defended, as well as their respective duties.²³ The Church reaffirms the urgent need for a rule of law that protects families, particularly migrants and refugees, who are aggrieved by new difficulties. The state must be the guarantor of equal legislative treatment and,

¹⁹ St. John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2004, no. 3.

²⁰ Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2015.

²¹ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 129.

²² *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 298.

²³ *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*. A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States, no. 38.

therefore, must protect all the rights of the migrant and refugee family, avoiding any form of discrimination in the areas of work, housing, health, education, and culture.²⁴

26. As bishops, we reiterate the importance of families in human development and their right to stay together. That is why we consider that the reunification of families and the avoidance of separation of minors from their parents must be approached with seriousness and compassion by the public leaders.

27. “A change of attitude towards migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone,” says Pope Francis, “moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization – all typical of a throwaway culture – towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world.”²⁵

28. It must be recognized that there are many organizations and institutions that put their work and energy at the service of those who emigrate in search of a better life. However, more effective and incisive action is necessary, through a well-developed network of collaboration that protects and advances the dignity and centrality of each human being.²⁶

29. Jesus said: “*I was a stranger and you welcomed me*” (Mt 25:35). The invitation to practice hospitality, which cannot be limited to the mere distribution of humanitarian aid, is current and urgent, but it must lead to sharing with those who are welcomed the gift of the revelation of the God of love, who “*so loved the world that he gave his only Son*” (Jn 3:16)²⁷.

CHAPTER III

TAKING ACTION REGARDING MIGRATION

30. The proclamation of the Gospel proposes the integral salvation of human persons and their authentic and effective liberation, achieving living conditions appropriate to their dignity. That is why the Church, starting from

²⁴ St. John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 1986, no. 3.

²⁵ Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ St. John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2002, no. 4.

Christ, announces fundamental human rights, promotes, and defends them. “Specifically, these are the right to have one’s own country, to live freely in one’s own country, to live together with one’s family, to have access to the goods necessary for a dignified life, to preserve and develop one’s ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage, to publicly profess one’s religion, to be recognized and treated in all circumstances according to one’s dignity as a human being.”²⁸

31. Pope Francis teaches, “The Church, responding to Christ’s command to ‘go and make disciples of all nations’, is called to be the People of God which embraces all peoples and brings to them the proclamation of the Gospel, for the face of each person bears the mark of the face of Christ! Here we find the deepest foundation of the dignity of the human person, which must always be respected and safeguarded. It is less the criteria of efficiency, productivity, social class, or ethnic or religious belonging which ground that personal dignity, so much as the fact of being created in God’s own image and likeness (*Gen* 1:26-27) and, even more so, being children of God.” This awareness, which springs from faith, must lead us to welcome, respect and love migrants, and thus contribute to the construction of a more just society, a fuller democracy, a more supportive country, a more fraternal world, and a more open Christian community, in accordance with the Gospel.²⁹
32. The pastoral care of migrants requires adequate preparation. That is why the bishops of the border between Texas and Mexico will continue to promote this formation of the clergy and the lay faithful, now and into the future. We will focus particularly on those directly responsible for this ministry of pastoral care.
33. Faced with the large migratory flow, which often overwhelms our service capacities, we will promote volunteer programs with greater intensity, especially among young people, and we will strengthen collaboration between the Church and society, promoting a positive culture toward the phenomenon of migration. We hope that this will gradually lead to better immigration policies in both countries.
34. Although in some dioceses the service to migrants is entrusted to a person or institution, this care corresponds to all the baptized. That is why we encourage

²⁸ St. John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2001, no. 3.

²⁹ Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014.

that the first place where itinerant people are welcomed is the parish. “The parish,” said Saint John Paul II, “which etymologically means a house where the guest feels at ease, welcomes all and discriminates against none, for no one there is an outsider.”³⁰

35. Concern for migrants must also be at the heart and in the action of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, in charitable organizations, in ecclesial movements, in associations, and in new communities. We recognize the generous welcome that consecrated people and lay people, personally or in association, provide to their migrant sisters and brothers. We encourage them to keep moving forward.
36. Convinced of the need for collaboration between the churches of origin, transit and destination, the bishops of both sides of the border commit to strengthening ongoing dialogue to support our respective episcopal conferences in this effort, to grow in solidarity between sister dioceses,³¹ and to encourage greater interfaith collaboration.
37. We ask the governments of both countries to:
- a. increase and simplify the granting of visas, and adopt private and community sponsorship programs;
 - b. open safe and legal humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable migrants and refugees;
 - c. provide adequate and decent accommodation;
 - d. guarantee basic services, personal security, adequate consular assistance, equal access to justice and religious freedom;
 - e. ensure the right to maintain possession of their personal identity documents;
 - f. give migrants freedom of movement and the ability to work;
 - g. offer the possibility of participating in an economy that allows them to ensure their vital subsistence;
 - h. protect minors, ensure them regular access to education, and provide for temporary custody or foster care programs;
 - i. promote the social insertion of migrants;
 - j. promote family reunification;
 - k. prepare local communities for integrative processes.

³⁰ St. John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 1999, no. 6.

³¹ *Ecclesia in America*, no. 74.

CONCLUSION

38. The bishops of the border between Texas and Mexico recognize the efforts of the governments of both countries, and we value the testimony of many people who have known how to become good Samaritans to their migrant sisters and brothers. There are so many lay faithful, consecrated persons, deacons, and priests who are reaching out to migrants and refugees. Thank you. And please, continue your service.
39. We ask God the Father to make us increasingly aware that in him we are all sisters and brothers, and to give us the strength to gather and find ourselves united in a “we” that is stronger than the sum of its members,³² so that together we may build societies capable of welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants and refugees.
40. May Our Lady of Guadalupe, who, together with her beloved Son and Saint Joseph, her husband, experienced the drama of migration, accompany our migrant brothers and help us all, public leaders, the Church and society, to understand and care for them with love, aware that, as Saint Augustine points out: “in this life of ours, we are pilgrims.”³³

³² Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, no. 78.

³³ Sermon 346B, 1.

As of January 7, 2024

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