



CARDINAL RIGALI CENTER
20 ARCHBISHOP MAY DRIVE
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI 63119
P) 314.792.7841
F) 314.792.7842
ARCHSTL.ORG

ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Robert J. Carlson, Archbishop of St. Louis | Pastoral Statement on Immigration & Mercy

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Mindful of my pastoral responsibility to bring the light of faith to bear on our historical reality (*Lumen Fidei*, 38), I wish to address our Catholic faithful and people of good will in this pastoral statement on immigration and mercy.

As a People of God, our Catholic journey and pilgrim identity is marked by a profound commitment to serving those around us, especially the most vulnerable, the poor and the migrant (Acts 4:32). In our country, the Church has been responsive to the waves of immigrants that have graced our American shores. The Irish, the German, the Italian, the Polish, and other European immigrants have found a generous hospitality in our Catholic churches and institutions.

Our Catholic sensibility and pastoral care has taught us that in serving the least among us, we have touched the face of Christ: “Come you that are blessed by my Father...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me” (Matthew 25: 34-35).

Our journey toward the Lord is still alive today. Our Catholic communities and public squares are replete with new faces of immigrant sisters and brothers who need our loving response. As the local bishop and pastor of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, I am aware of the painful stories of immigrants whose ongoing sufferings and sacrifices reveal to us the presence of Jesus crucified.

And, as I listen to our national discourse on immigration, I am becoming increasingly concerned about the language and rhetoric of discrimination, hate and alienation. In my visits and conversations with our Hispanic sisters and brothers, in particular, I have heard how difficult, painful and divisive this rhetoric of hate has been, and how it is creating an atmosphere of anxiety, withdrawal and fear.

For many of our immigrant Hispanic youth and young adults, this anti-immigrant atmosphere is also contributing to legislative initiatives that make it difficult for them to successfully contribute to the common good. At this time of uncertainty, our Hispanic families need to know that our Catholic community, both locally and nationally, is here to accompany and stand firmly with them.

In my *Homily for the Mass of Peace and Justice*, I stressed the need to give greater attention to the work of justice by elevating our respect for one another and our commitment to being with one another in the suffering, not letting our brothers and sisters bear their sufferings alone, helping each one to carry the

Cross of suffering and respecting at all times their human dignity. Hence, our need to fix our gaze on the greater signs of solidarity and hope promised to us in the Resurrection.

As your bishop and pastor, I am attentive to the complexities of working for immigration reform. While I fully support the labor of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Justice for Immigrants Campaign, I do so knowing that for many this public advocacy and work brings personal apprehensions and resistance. At the same time, I am grateful to Catholics and people of good will in the archdiocese who are reaching out to our immigrant communities.

I recognize, too, that work on behalf of immigration reform can cultivate seeds of discord and division among our faithful when viewed independently of the light of faith. Yet, as members of the one Body of Christ, we remain confident in our faith (Romans 12:3-5). We stand on solid ground when our faith illumines our pastoral practice of respect for the human dignity of all persons and service for the common good. More than ever, our social, political and world reality urges us to engage this pastoral issue with evangelical justice and charity in our hearts (Colossians 3:12-15).

And in a special way, our hearts and minds also attend to the cry of the many thousands of people who are leaving their homelands because of religious persecution or in search of a better life for their families. The global migration and refugee crisis we are facing as a human family, and the pain and brokenness that many of our sisters and brothers are encountering as they search for more humane conditions of life cannot be ignored. As Catholics, we must continue to pray for God's grace and mercy to be abundant, so that the families and children who are directly affected may find welcoming hands at the end of their journeys.

Furthermore, we must ensure that our prayers always be accompanied by concrete actions for what is right and just. As our Sacred Scripture tells us, our faith cannot be devoid of visible love and care for one another (James 2:14-17). This means that each one of us must find ways to engage and contribute to the humanitarian efforts that are responding to the migration and refugee crisis at hand. And as we strive to do our part, we recall the words of Pope Francis reminding us that our human efforts are never far from God: "God is able to multiply our small gestures of solidarity and make us partakers of his gift."

It is in the spirit of prayerful conversion and pastoral mercy to our global and local reality that I reaffirm my own commitment to accompany our immigrant and refugee communities. Indeed, the world realities of migration are not far from our shores and neighborhoods. Today, I also call upon the faithful of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and people of good will to join me in expressing our solidarity and hope. Our mission as one Pilgrim Church is to serve in the manner of Christ, and to follow closely in the footsteps of our Lord and Savior (*Lumen Gentium*, 14).

As we journey together and prepare for the *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, may we recognize that we are strangers no longer and seek to bring to light God's mercy: "It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 10).