

You Welcomed Me

A Pastoral Letter on Migration Released on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe ♦ December 12, 2005

Developed and approved by the Arizona Catholic Conference and the Byzantine Catholic Eparchy of Van Nuys



On the great Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we contemplate the image of Mary that she left on the tilma (mantle) of St. Juan Diego in 1531. Her gentle face, tender and serene, invites us to move beyond any perspectives, attitudes, and feelings that diminish the dignity and value of people who may be different from ourselves in appearance, language, or culture. Like the star-filled sky it symbolizes, her mantle encompasses us and encourages us to be as open in our welcome and acceptance of others. This invitation is found over and over in Scripture and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

“Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.” *Hebrews 13:2*

“The Church in America must be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another. Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration.”

— *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in America of the Holy Father John Paul II, January 22, 1999.*

“I was a stranger and you welcomed me’ (Mt 25:35). Today, the illegal migrant comes before us like that ‘stranger’ in whom Jesus asks to be recognized. To welcome him and to show him solidarity is a

duty of hospitality and fidelity to Christian identity itself.”

— *Pope John Paul II, Annual Message for World Migration Day 1996.*

“The Catholic community is rapidly re-encountering itself as an “immigrant Church,” a witness at once to the diversity of people who make up our world and to our unity in one humanity, destined to enjoy the fullness of God’s blessings in Jesus Christ. For the Church in the United States, to walk in solidarity with newcomers to our country is to live out our catholicity as a Church.”

— *The Catholic Bishops of the United States, “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity,” November 2000.*

I. Why We Speak

We, the Catholic Bishops of Arizona, are deeply saddened by the death and suffer-

ing we see on our border. We are aware that our communities have become increasingly divided as a result of the immigration in our state. We have seen mounting expressions of hostility and opposition to undocumented immigrants. We are concerned about the image that some may have of Arizona as a state which is hostile to immigrants. We do not believe this to be true. Many of us in Arizona were ourselves warmly welcomed here and we wish to see that same hospitality continue.

In the parishes of our dioceses we meet many good people who hold strong feelings and attitudes about immigration. Oftentimes their opinions are stated with

great emotion and passion. They often have a negative view of immigrants in Arizona and pose challenging questions:

Why don't these immigrants enter the United States legally? Don't we need to control our borders to keep out terrorists? Why doesn't Mexico find jobs for its own people? Don't immigrants take resources and jobs that Arizonans and American citizens need? Why is the Church involved in political issues like immigration?

These are legitimate questions asked by Catholics and others of good will. Their answers are found in education, reasoned discourse, and prayer.*

As we listen, we realize the complexity of this situation and that there are no facile or easy solutions. We acknowledge the legitimate strain of this crisis on our bor-

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* For more information on these questions, go to www.justiceforimmigrants.org and click on Parish Resources.

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der communities, ranching families, property owners, the Tohono O'odham Nation, our hospitals, and local authorities, among others. We believe, however, that it is possible to find common ground among all those affected by this situation, to respond to people's fears and misunderstandings, and for Arizona to lead the country to a comprehensive and permanent solution to our broken immigration system.

Immigrants, both documented and undocumented, constitute a growing percentage of Arizona Catholics. Finding new ways to welcome and integrate immigrants into parish life can only make us a stronger and more united Church in Arizona. As Catholics, we are called to live out the principles of global solidarity, to care for and defend the human dignity of one another as members of one universal Body of Christ, and to be active in the public arena to bring the Gospel to bear on the pressing issues of the day. "Through history and especially in the last hundred years, the Church has never failed to speak the words that are hers with regard to questions concerning life in society."¹

Thus, as Bishops we issue this pastoral letter on migration. We present our concerns and our vision through a collection of testimonies and stories from those involved in this crisis. We invite our pastors and our people to come together to reflect on these issues and stories, and to discuss ways to transform this situation. Parishes are particularly invited to prayerfully reflect and comment in small groups on this pastoral letter.

II. Migration in the Light of our Religious Tradition and Teachings

A. Scriptural Foundations

The enslavement of the Chosen People by the Egyptians and their liberation by God led to numerous commandments regarding the stranger in the Old Testament. God reminds the people of Israel to befriend the strangers among them, because they too had experienced alienation in a foreign land (cf. Dt 10: 19). "You shall treat the stranger who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lv 19:33-34).² Care for the stranger was even incorporated into the gleaning and tithing laws of the day. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not be so thorough that you reap the field to its very edge... nor gather up the grapes that have fallen. These things you shall leave for the poor and the alien" (Lv 19:9-10).

In the Gospels of the New Testament, we hear of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt as refugees. This has become a symbol of hope and courage for migrants and refugees throughout the ages. In St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus teaches us that by caring for the stranger, the sick, the hungry, we are in fact caring for Him (cf. Mt 25:35-36,40). Perhaps the Gospel story which best illustrates our call to welcome the stranger is that of the Good Samaritan, in which Jesus tells us to embrace the strangers

"I know God doesn't want my children to go hungry. God gave me strong legs and arms to work hard and a strong heart to risk whatever I must for my family. I know crossing the desert will be very hard. Yes, I am afraid. But what choice do I have?"

José Luis, a 35-year-old migrant from Chiapas, Mexico, preparing to cross the Arizona desert on foot.



among us, regardless of their nationalities or their differences. Finally, the Risen Christ commands His apostles to go to all nations to preach His message and draw all people through faith and baptism into the life of God. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians reminds us that the Spirit unites all peoples of all races and cultures into the one family of God, so that there are no longer strangers or aliens among us (cf. Eph 2:17-20).

B. Catholic Social Teaching

The encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, written in 1891 about the plight of workers in the Industrial Revolution and the great wave of European migration to the United States, was the first document to address the right to migrate to sustain one's family. Pope Pius XI affirmed this right again 40 years later in his document, *Quadragesimo Anno*.

At the end of World War II, with the unprecedented migration of millions of refugees and displaced people across the world, Pope Pius XII issued the document *Exsul Familia* in 1952, taking its name from the "Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt." This document underscored the Church's commitment to "pilgrims, aliens, exiles and migrants of every kind." Based on the Biblical and ancient Christian teaching that the goods of the earth belong to all people, it reaffirmed the principle that people have the right to migrate to sustain their families when they are unable to achieve a life of dignity in their own land.

Catholic teaching also recognizes that nations have the right to

control their own borders and to regulate immigration, but that this right is not absolute. *Exsul Familia* states that the needs of immigrants must be measured against the needs of the receiving countries, and that the rights of these nations must not be exaggerated to the point of denying access to needy people from other countries.

In 1963, in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Blessed Pope John XXIII expands the right to migrate, but also the right of all persons to find opportunities to support themselves and their families in their own countries, without being forced to migrate. Our teachings also tell us that all people should have the right to seek refugee and asylum status without being incarcerated if their lives are in danger in their homeland. The final principle underscoring all Church teachings on migration is that the human dignity and human rights of all migrants, regardless of their legal status, should be respected and upheld. The U.S. bishops have spoken out several times over the years on the need to respect the rights and dignity of undocumented immigrants in our country. One of the most significant documents released by the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops in 2003, in conjunction with the Mexican Bishops' Conference, was the pastoral statement on migration known as "*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*."



III. Arizona at the Center of the Immigration Debate

Arizona has become the focal point of the immigration debate in recent years. The concentration of border crossing activity on the Arizona-Mexico border, the record number of migrant deaths, and growing presence of civilian patrol groups have focused attention on the Arizona border like never before.

Arizona and Mexico have a long history of economic and cultural interdependence and integration. The missions established by Padre Eusebio Kino remain a powerful testament to the shared history, faith, and heritage of the Arizona-Mexico borderlands. The U.S. government's decision to increase border enforcement in Texas and California in the mid-1990s, however, has had the effect of funneling many more undocumented migrants through the remote and treacherous deserts of southern Arizona. These policies have failed to reduce the number of undocumented immigrants living in the United States, have not deterred migrants from attempting to cross the border, but instead have led to a dramatic increase in migrant deaths in recent years. In fiscal year 2005, at least 261 border crossing deaths were documented in Arizona, while 460 migrant deaths were reported all along the U.S.-Mexico border.³

Many Catholics in our state are legitimately concerned about the fact that undocumented immigrants are violating our nation's laws. We firmly support humane enforcement of our country's laws; however, as is the case with other issues, we believe that our immigration laws are outdated and no longer fit the economic realities and security needs of our times. Our nation's demand for labor and the increasing displacement of farmers and workers in Mexico and Central America call for a new approach to regulating immigration from those countries. Economic globalization trends which allow capital and goods to flow freely across borders require a new approach to managing the flows of migrant workers across our borders. Very few legal avenues are currently available to migrant workers who wish to enter the United States legally.

An estimated 10 million undocumented immigrants currently live in the United States and are making important contributions to our society and our Church. While we do not condone undocumented immigration, we recognize that it would not be feasible to deport all of these immigrants. We must find a way to bring them out of the shadows and incorporate them into society. This will ultimately enhance national security, help stabilize the labor market in the United States, improve the living standards of immigrant communities, and encourage them to become more active participants in our society.

"I tried to come legally. I applied for a visa at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, but it was denied. No one wants to come to the U.S. like this [without documents]. I would be very happy to pay whatever they would

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charge me for a work visa if I could come across legally and safely.”

— José, from Sinaloa, Mexico, has lived in the U.S. for five years and is active at a Catholic parish in South Tucson.

“The amount of damage that this costs us in weight loss of cattle, fences torn up, pipelines torn up... It's hard, folks, it's hard. I have nothing against the people. I have Mexicans who are good friends. It's a terrible thing they have to go through. I would support a law that gives them a legal way to get across the border, especially if it would mean they stop coming across my land.”

— A Catholic rancher outside of Douglas.

“We can no longer afford to bury our heads in the sand and expect this problem to go away. Today, undocumented immigrants live in constant fear, in a shadowy underground that affords them limited opportunities and frequently leads to both exploitation and abuse... The majority of these people are seeking the American dream, looking for a good paying job that will enable them to provide a better life for themselves and their families... Our nation was built by immigrants, and like those who came hundreds of years ago, this population represents a significant portion of our workforce... Last fiscal year, an estimated 320 people died crossing the southern border into this country. This unnecessary loss of human life deserves our nation's attention and should compel all of us to action.”

— Senator John McCain's statement while introducing a bi-partisan bill for comprehensive immigration reform in the Senate on July 25, 2003.⁴

IV. The Immigrant Journey: A Story of Hardship and Sacrifice

It is often easy to overlook the hardships that undocumented immigrants must endure to reach the United States, to cross the border, to live in a country in which they are not legally recognized and often subjected to discrimination and abuse. For the vast majority, it is not a decision that is taken lightly. Parents, children, and grandchildren are separated, often for years on end. Whole communities are split up or abandoned, and cultural traditions are lost.

“When the economic crisis hit Mexico, the factory my husband worked at closed and he lost his job. For two years, we struggled. I made food to sell in the market to feed our six children. It was a hard time. Then some friends living in Phoenix offered to help me get a job. It was a very difficult decision to leave — my oldest child was 13. I arrived in Phoenix on November 6, 1995. The first few months I worked for a company that sold food out of a truck. I worked from 3 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon and they paid me \$20 a week. Three years later my husband and children were finally able to join me. People don't understand why we do this unless they have ever experienced being unable to feed their children or give them shoes, if they have ever heard their children asking for food and not have had anything to give them.”

— Emma, 52-year-old immigrant from



Puebla, Mexico, residing in Phoenix since 1995 and active in St. Martin de Porres Parish.

“This trip is very hard. Some of us have been traveling for two months riding on top of the trains, walking, or on buses. And everywhere you go, the Mexican officials stop you and make you give them bribes to keep going, sometimes \$60, sometimes \$80. You get robbed and beat up along the way. We just want to stay in the U.S. for a little while and make some money and then go home. And now we have to start all over.”

— A Honduran man detained by the Mexican immigration officials just south of Douglas, and now facing deportation back to Honduras.

“Why is it that when people look at us and see that we're migrants, they automatically think we're bad? We just come to work hard, we don't steal from anyone or do bad things. Why do they see us that way?”

— Duvalier, young migrant from Chiapas, Mexico.

“It is very difficult to cross the desert. I already tried twice and got sent back. They told us to rub garlic all over ourselves to keep the snakes away. The first night I had terrible cramps in my feet. You try to drink just a little water at a time so you have more left.”

“When you get close to running out, you try to get water from the cattle tanks or from the puddles in the desert if it rains. I spent four nights in the desert. Each one of us had to carry seven gallons of water. There were some who drank too much and ran out and the rest of us had to share our water with them. This other man and I started feeling sick and we fell behind. We were walking and suddenly we saw someone on the ground, leaning against a tree and we stopped to ask if he needed help. Then we saw that he was dead and his face was decomposing. It felt horrible to see someone in that condition. When you see something like that, you think you're going to die too. I keep my spirits high by remembering the hunger back home and that I need to feed my family. If I go back, what am I going to give them?”

— Víctor Manuel, migrant from

Veracruz, Mexico, waiting in the town of Altar to attempt to cross the border again.

V. Immigrants Contribute to Our Economic, Community and Parish Life

Much of our state's economy is highly dependent on the contributions of immigrants, both documented and undocumented, and the many Mexican tourists and shoppers who visit Arizona. According to the Thunderbird School of International Management's report in 2003, “The Economic Impact of the Mexico-Arizona Relationship,” Mexican immigrants generated a fiscal surplus of approximately \$106 million to Arizona in 2001. The same report concluded that the economic relationship of commerce, trade, and immigration between Arizona and Mexico is worth over \$13.5 billion per year; \$8 billion for Arizona and \$5.5 billion for Mexico, with a net economic advantage to Arizona of \$2.5 billion.⁵

Immigrants from Mexico and Latin America also bring deeply rooted religious traditions and practices to our communities and parishes. They have proven themselves to be extremely hard working and very committed to the family values we hold so dear. Many of our parishes in the state have blossomed because of the contributions of new immigrant parishioners and their families. Many Catholics' lives have been deeply touched by coming into contact with the hardworking men and women who would risk so much to make a better life for their families.

“Immigrants are the lifeblood of our industry. We cannot harvest our crops without them. It's as simple as that... People say to me, why don't you move your operations across the border to Mexico, where you can pay someone \$5 for a 10-hour work day? My answer is no. My job is to make sure that I provide God's children a living wage, and treat them fairly because we are all created in God's image.”

— Gary Pasquinelli, Catholic grower in Yuma.

“Our industry relies on immigrant workers.”
— John Bremond, president of KB Homes on the importance of immigrant workers to the home-building industry in Arizona.

“It has been 25 years since I immigrated to this country from Ireland. I thought at the time that the immigration procedures were pretty rigorous. Three months, it took, for the approval to come through. I imagine it would be years if I were applying today. My own immigration experience has been a very positive one. I was embraced by the community in Arizona. This country has welcomed me with open arms. I look around me today, at the anti-immigrant sentiment growing in this state, and I squirm. What's wrong with this picture? Why are things so different for today's immigrants?”

— Tricia, St. Patrick's Parish, Scottsdale.

“Immigrants are both an opportunity and a test of the hospitality and Christian outreach of the parish. Especially in the case of Latin American immigrants, the intense devotion and desire to join the Church has been an example to us all.”

— Rev. Daniel P. Daley, Pastor of St. Mary of the Angels, Pinetop.

“I had never been involved in anything before. Two years ago, our pastor invited a group to go across the border to Altar, Mexico. I had no idea what we were going to do, if we were going to go shopping or what. We got to Altar and split up in two groups to go speak with the migrants. I noticed a woman sitting back in the corner. I don't speak Spanish, so I took someone from the group who did. I asked her if she had any kids. She had four children, and had left them back in Chiapas. And then she started crying. And I started crying. And I reached out to give her a hug, and she just hung on. And we cried and cried, and that for me was the moment. I asked myself, where was I when all of this was happening? Why wasn't I paying attention?”

— Barbara, Our Mother of Sorrows Parish, Tucson.

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VI. Our Vision for the Future

We believe that Arizona can lead our country toward a solution to this crisis. We can build on our common ground and our shared values as Catholics to develop, along with others in our community, a solution that protects the dignity of the migrants among us, strengthens our communities, makes us safer as a nation, and builds on the great immigrant heritage of our country.

As the Catholic Bishops in Arizona, we commit ourselves and we urge our people to join with us in:

1. Engaging in prayer for and with all those affected by this crisis. Let us pray for a just and peaceful solution to the suffering on our border, especially for the migrants who have died and their families, for our lawmakers, for the safety of those charged with enforcing our immigration laws, and for the grace to heal our communities and repair our broken immigration system.

2. Making our parishes more welcoming. Let us strive to open our hearts to the newcomers in our midst, find ways to celebrate the growing cultural and ethnic diversity of our parishes, and invite immigrant families into active parish life.

3. Educating ourselves about the issues. Finding a common solution to this crisis requires us to better educate and inform ourselves about the complex issues of immigration facing our communities. We invite Catholics to draw upon the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Justice for Immigrants Campaign and documents such as "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope." We encourage parish participation in a delegation to Altar, Sonora, or other Mexican border communities, to experience the reality of the situation firsthand.

4. Calling for comprehensive immigration reform. We Arizonans are uniquely positioned to call for a change in our country's immigration laws. Our communities and our churches are affected on a daily basis by an issue which must be resolved at the federal level. We believe that such reforms will benefit us all and begin to put an end to the tragic and unnecessary death and suffering on our border. Our state's Congressional leaders have begun to lead the way. Let us support and encourage them to remain steadfast in

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God,
we praise and thank you through Jesus Christ our Lord
for your presence and action in the world.

In the midst of conflict and division,
we know it is you who turn our minds to thoughts of peace.

Your Spirit changes our hearts:
enemies begin to speak to one another,
those who were estranged join hands in friendship,
and nations seek the way of peace together.

Your Spirit is at work when understanding puts an end to strife,
when hatred is quenched by mercy
and vengeance gives way to forgiveness.

For this we should never cease to thank and praise you. Amen.⁶

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us
Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, ruega por nosotros

their commitment to just and lasting immigration reform and not settle for an enforcement-only solution.*

5. Supporting efforts to reduce poverty in Mexico and Latin America. We can help create the conditions that will give people an alternative to migration by supporting organizations working to reduce poverty south of the border, by purchasing products produced under the fair trade conditions outlined by the U.S. Bishops, and by encouraging our government to adopt trade and foreign aid policies which will foster equitable and sustainable development for all.

6. Participating in the partnership with our sister diocese in Mexico. The Tucson, Phoenix and Hermosillo Dioceses have come together in partnership to build stronger ties of friendship, mutual understanding and collaboration between our people, our parishes, and our diocesan ministries. In this way, we can continue to build a Church that transcends national borders and works together to promote justice and solidarity in both our countries and beyond. We welcome all Arizona Catholics to join in this effort.

7. Joining with people of other faiths and those of good will to find solutions. As Catholics, we seek to work together with people of other faith traditions and all those of good will to find policy solutions to our immigration crisis and to better inform ourselves and our congregations.

* The U.S. Catholic Bishops have called for comprehensive immigration reform which includes
1) measures to address the root causes of migration; 2) legalization of the undocumented, regardless of national origin; 3) a temporary worker program which includes worker protections and just wages and benefits; 4) family-based immigration reform which reduces waiting times for family reunification; and 5) restoration of due process protections for immigrants.
For more information, visit www.usccb.org and click on Migration and Refugee Services.

NOTES

¹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, p. xxi.

² Biblical citation taken directly from USCCB statement "Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity," November 2000.

³ Richard Marosi, "Border Crossing Deaths Set a 12-Month Record," *Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 2005.

⁴ "McCain Introduces Comprehensive Immigration Reform," July 25, 2003. Press Release retrieved from www.mccain.senate.gov.

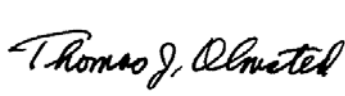
⁵ Thunderbird, The American Graduate School of International Management, *Economic Impact of the Mexico-Arizona Relationship* (Phoenix: Thunderbird, The American Graduate School of International Management, May 2003), 7.

⁶ Prayer taken from Preface, Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II.

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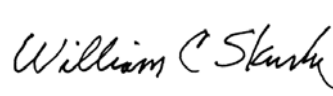
Most Rev. Donald E. Pelotte
Bishop of Gallup

+ 

Most Rev. Thomas J. Olmsted
Bishop of Phoenix

+ 

Most Rev. Gerald F. Kicanas
Bishop of Tucson

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Most Rev. William C. Skurla
Bishop of Byzantine Catholic
Eparchy of Van Nuys

Study and Reflection Guide

Readers and parishes are encouraged to participate in a small group sharing and reflection process on the document. Prayerfully review and reflect on each week's designated sections prior to the group meeting.

Week 1

Preparation: Review and prayerfully reflect on the Introduction and Sections I and II.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. Why is it fitting for this document to be published on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe?
2. What introductory quote most struck you as you read the text?
3. Have you heard what the Bishops are hearing (in Section I)? How do those comments strike you?
4. Is it important for the Bishops to speak on these issues of migrants dying in our deserts and of the division in our communities over the issue of immigration? Why or why not?
5. How can your parish help to create a better understanding of how immigration affects the life and dignity of the human person?

Week 2

Preparation: Review and prayerfully reflect on Sections III and IV.

Review the policy recommendations from the Justice for Immigrants Campaign. Visit the Web: www.justiceforimmigrants.org.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. What did you feel as you read the quotes of the migrants about their journey and their experiences?
2. Do you agree with the bishops that the current immigration policy should be changed?
3. Do you agree with the bishops' recommendations for comprehensive immigration reform (see footnote 2 in Section VI)?
4. What do you believe should be included in a comprehensive immigration policy?
5. How might you and your parish contribute to changing the current system?

Week 3

Preparation: Review and prayerfully reflect on Sections V and VI.

Small Group Discussion Questions:

1. How do you see immigrants contributing to our society and our Church?
2. What quotes most spoke to you in this section?
3. How might you agree or disagree with the vision for the future in Section VI?
4. How might some of these be implemented?
5. What can you or your parish do to change attitudes toward immigrants and integrate them into the life of your parish?