

The Old Catholic Communion

*“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Matthew 25:35*

August 2025

A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Old Catholic Communion: Defending Immigrants, Refugees, and Sacred Human Dignity

**To the People of God, and to all who seek justice and
mercy:**

Grace and peace to you in the name of Christ—the refugee child of Bethlehem, an outsider in his own land, the stranger on the road, the bearer of hope to the oppressed and the one who taught us that in welcoming the foreigner we welcome him.

We as bishops write with deep concern and fervent love for all members of our Church and communities, especially those who live each day under the weight of fear, discrimination, and displacement. In this moment, when refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers, many of them innocent and vulnerable, are being unjustly arrested, detained, and deported, we cannot remain silent. The moment has come for us to act to confront policies that endanger human dignity and assault sacred trust. Therefore, we offer this **Pastoral Letter** with sacred urgency, not out of partisanship but as a proclamation of the Gospel’s call to offer one another radical hospitality.

I. When Justice Becomes Persecution

“You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt,”¹

Throughout scripture, God's people are called to care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. This leads us to have grave concerns regarding recent enforcement actions targeting immigrants and minorities. We have witnessed with deep sorrow the unjust arrest, detention, and deportation of many immigrants—our brothers and sisters. As of this Pastoral Letter, over 100,000 people have been detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and a staggering 72% of these individuals had no criminal convictions.² Their only “offense” has been living peaceably, working to provide food for their children, and seeking to build a safe future for themselves and their loved ones. It is beyond comprehension that we would allow those who have fled danger and persecution in their home country to now face danger and persecution in ours. This is not the America we know and love. The criminalization of families, the expansion of detention infrastructure, and the erosion of due process are not only policy failures—they are moral offenses designed to rip communities apart.

II. Inhumane Detention Practices

“Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.”³

We categorically denounce the construction and operation of detention centers that function as black site facilities where individuals are disappeared, relocated without notice, and warehoused in conditions that strip them of their dignity and rights. Shrouded in secrecy, these facilities operate with impunity, beyond public oversight and moral accountability. Such practices are not only

¹ Exodus 22:21

² <https://www.lawfirm4immigrants.com/>

³ Hebrews 13:3

morally indefensible but also violate the foundational principles of due process and human decency.

The denial of legal representation is now systemic. Detainees are frequently transferred across state lines without notice to their families or attorneys, making it nearly impossible to track their location or ensure their well-being. In some cases, even basic identifying information is erased, effectively rendering them untraceable to advocates and loved ones. This tactic, described by legal experts as a form of bureaucratic erasure, obstructs legal intervention and undermines the right to due process.⁴ Clergy and family members are often thwarted or made to wait for hours without gaining access. Often, they discover the detainee has been transferred to another facility or has already been deported.⁵

We call for an immediate end to these practices and demand the restoration of transparency, oversight, and humanity in all immigration enforcement operations. No person should be hidden from justice, stripped of identity, or denied the right to be seen, heard, and spiritually supported.

III. An Assault on Birthright Citizenship and Legal Belonging

“The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”⁶

“You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice.”⁷

⁴ Could You Prove You're a Citizen?

<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/trump-ice-detained-citizenship-proof.html>

⁵ At a Basement ICE Detention Facility, Clergy Face Barriers to Visit Congregants, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/07/ice-los-angeles-immigration-detention-clergy-visits/>

⁶ Leviticus 19:34

⁷ Deuteronomy 24:17

We speak out against any efforts to revoke the birthright citizenship of children born to immigrant parents. This right and legal standing is guaranteed under the 14th Amendment.⁸ President Trump's executive orders threaten to unjustly render countless families stateless, stripping them of stability, future, and belonging. These actions threaten to cast entire families, many born here and knowing no other home, into a state of legal limbo and existential fear.

Such actions are an affront to the spiritual values of justice, human dignity, and the sacredness of community that are central to our Catholic tradition. To delegitimize the children of immigrants is to deny the sacred image of God in them and disrupt our social structure and the common good. These individuals are not chattel to be moved around at whim; they are our children, members of our parishes, and precious members of the Body of Christ.

IV. Desecrating the Sacred: When the State Enters Holy Ground

“Woe to those who enact unjust statutes and issue oppressive decrees.”⁹

The right to worship without fear is not a privilege but a founding principle of our nation and a First Amendment right protected by the Constitution. Once havens of peace, our churches are now being turned into surveillance zones of fear. We are deeply disturbed by the recent reports of ICE enforcement operations in and around churches, especially in California, where immigrants were recently arrested in or around sacred spaces.¹⁰

These acts do permanent damage to the Body of Christ. When congregants feel they must choose between practicing their faith and

⁸ U.S. Constitution, Amendment XIV

⁹ Isaiah 10:1

¹⁰ California Bishop denounces raids.

<https://www.mercurynews.com/2025/06/25/after-reports-of-ice-at-churches-in-montclair-and-highland-san-bernardino-bishop-denounces-raids/>

protecting their families, the constitutional guarantee of religious liberty lies in ruins.

This fear is not just theoretical. In recent months, our communities have experienced:

- Immigrant families are stepping back from worship services and Christian education programs due to fear of exposure or detention.
- Communal fellowship and koinonia are being stifled by the pervasive fear of surveillance and monitoring.
- Church leaders are grappling with how to protect their congregations from unexpected ICE activity or immigration raids during services.
- Churches have to alter or limit their outreach and advertising efforts, fearing that increased visibility may lead to targeting by immigration enforcement.

Let us be unequivocal: We must ensure our churches remain sanctuaries of grace, never instruments of state intimidation. We must always provide safety for all who seek to worship God.

V. Curtailing Immigration Today Risks Crisis Tomorrow

“When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings.”¹¹

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”¹²

We understand that many argue for tighter immigration controls in the name of economic and national security. Researchers, however, warn that we will experience a severe demographic and labor crisis if immigration is curtailed. The United States, like many other

¹¹ Deuteronomy 24:19

¹² Matthew 9:37

countries, is facing an aging population, a decline in birth rates, and a labor shortage in key sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, construction, and elder care.

Immigrants contribute without the ability to receive government benefits. They currently make up 18% of the US labor force and contribute to the national economy.¹³ Without sustained immigration, the U.S. population will continue to shrink, leading to a contraction of the workforce and a strain on social support systems. In fact, some economists suggest that if immigration is drastically reduced now, the country will be forced to aggressively recruit foreign workers in the future, not out of compassion, but out of economic necessity.

Deportation also has an impact on the economy. Researchers claim that if the Trump Administration were successful in deporting 11 million immigrants as he has promised to do, our Gross Domestic Product would shrink anywhere from 4.2% to 6.8%, resulting in a downturn greater than the Great Recession.¹⁴ Undocumented immigrants also contribute around \$46.8 billion in federal taxes and \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes annually.¹⁵ Their removal would erase these revenues. The result is that mass deportation is not only short-sighted, it is economically irresponsible.

VI. Betrayed Trust

“Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”¹⁶

¹³ Resistant to Reform? Improving U.S. Immigration Policy Through Data, Evidence, and Innovation, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/08/united-states-immigration-reform-evidence?lang=en>

¹⁴ New Report Shows the Devastating Costs of Mass Deportation. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/report-costs-mass-deportation-immigration/>

¹⁵ The Economic Consequences of Mass Deportation, <https://jgspl.org/the-economic-consequences-of-mass-deportation/>

¹⁶ Ephesians 4:25

We have read accounts and personally know instances when the government has unilaterally vacated or terminated parole status for those protected under former humanitarian policies and for those seeking asylum. Most of these parolees have passed background checks, secured sponsors, and were actively complying with legal processes. They are now being told that their work permits have been revoked and they must self-deport within 30 days.

In many blue states, immigrants are now being arrested at immigration courts, even after their cases have been dismissed or their residence has been approved. These ICE agents often dress in plain clothing, wearing masks, and carry no identifiable badge, and detaining individuals who came in good faith to comply with legal proceedings. These actions are nothing more than entrapment and send a horrible message, and stoke confusion and fear.

Furthermore, ICE has officially authorized its civil enforcement agents to use strategic deception to carry out arrests. These ruses are designed to bypass the legal limitations of administrative warrants, which do not allow agents to enter a home without consent. These tactics exploit trust in public institutions like police and courts. They erode community safety, as immigrants become afraid to report crimes or seek help. These deceptive actions mean that immigrants who were once willing to trust the system are now forced to choose between legal obedience and personal safety.

VII. A Call to Action for the Faithful

“You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”¹⁷

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”¹⁸

The sacred teachings of the bible and Catholic tradition do not permit neutrality. They compel us not only to welcome the stranger but also

¹⁷ Exodus 22:21

¹⁸ Matthew 25:35

to speak when the stranger is vilified and to act when the vulnerable are criminalized for seeking hope, safety, and dignity. Let us remember that silence in the face of oppression is complicity. Love made manifest—through word and witness—is the way of Christ. We are not naïve about the risks, but the Good News of the Gospel calls us to be courageous despite our fear.¹⁹

We urge our members and every believer and person of conscience to:

- **Prayer and action:** Prayer is important, but must be accompanied by action.
- **Holy resistance:** Join peaceful protests, write letters, speak to lawmakers, and refuse to let fear stifle faith. Speak boldly whenever and wherever you find injustice.
- **Refuse to remain silent:** History tells us that apathy and silence are complicity. Speak boldly in our parishes, neighborhoods, and community forums. Speak on behalf of our immigrant sisters and brothers whose voices are being stifled. Name the injustice. Tell the stories. Counter the lies with love and truth.
- **Work for justice:** Remember that injustice anywhere, especially against the vulnerable, is injustice against God, for God is love and cares especially for the poor and needy.²⁰
- **Challenge nationalistic policies:** Engage and challenge lawmakers and leaders. Denounce xenophobic policies or actions that target people based on their skin color, the language they speak, or the cultures they hold dear. Seek ways to protect the vulnerable, both physically and legally, and work to thwart discriminatory legislation.
- **Advocate for dignity:** Demand just and compassionate policies that end mistreatment of individuals and uphold the God-given worth and dignity of every human being.

¹⁹ 1 John 4:18

²⁰ 1 John 3:17

- **Accompany immigrants:** Volunteer to drive or accompany immigrants to court-appointed hearings. Be an agent of support, an advocate for justice, and a witness against intimidation or mistreatment.
- **Demand accountability:** Urge our political leaders to require transparency regarding the current Administration's immigration policies. Push for legislation that will prohibit masked, plain-clothed government agents from rounding up and detaining people without an official judicial warrant.
- **Know your rights:** Educate yourself and others regarding your rights and the rights of immigrants.²¹ Help them understand what they can do to protect themselves from unethical and immoral police practices.
- **Defend the freedom of worship:** Find ways to ensure your sacred spaces remain welcoming places that offer sanctuary for all those who seek shelter and safety. Stand up for the right to peaceful assembly wherever it is threatened.
- **Demand the right to practice one's faith:** Demand that our clergy be granted access to visit parishioners or others who are being held as detainees. Document instances where your requests for spiritual care are ignored or dismissed, and file a formal complaint when necessary.

Brothers and sisters:

Let our silence be broken by love.

Let our Communion be one of witness.

Let our communities embody sanctuary.

Let our actions overcome injustice.

With courage born of conviction and hearts rooted in Christ, we remain,

²¹ ACLU's "Immigrants' Rights": <https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights>

† *The Bishops of the Old Catholic Communion*

+ *Steven M. Rosczewski*

Bishop Steven Rosczewski

+ *Dewayne Messenger*

Bishop Dewayne Messenger

+ *Martin Shanahan*

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+ *Gordon E. Barcalow*

Bishop Gordon Barcalow

+ *Michael Scalzi*

Bishop Michael Scalzi, Bishop Chair

Resources Regarding Immigrants, Foreigners, and Sojourners

Legal/Human Rights Sources

- ACLU's "Immigrants' Rights":
<https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights>
- UNHCR guidance on detention and rights of asylum seekers:
<https://www.unhcr.org/detention>
- National Immigration Law Center (NILC):
<https://www.nilc.org>

Scripture	Text
Leviticus 19:34	"The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself..."
Deuteronomy 10:18–19	"He defends the cause of the fatherless... and loves the foreigner... giving them food and clothing."
Exodus 22:21	"Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner..."
Exodus 23:9	"Do not oppress a foreigner... for you were foreigners in Egypt."
Isaiah 58:6–7	"Share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter..."
Jeremiah 22:3	"Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner..."
Matthew 25:35	"I was a stranger and you welcomed me."
Hebrews 13:2	"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers..."
Romans 12:13	Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."
Galatians 3:28	"There is neither Jew nor Gentile... for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
Acts 10:34–35	"God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."