



TENNESSEE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

June 6, 2025

Statement on Immigration Enforcement and the Dignity of Migrants

A Climate of Fear and the Call for Due Process

The recent immigration enforcement action conducted by the Tennessee Highway Patrol and several federal agencies, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Nashville has spread fear throughout the city's immigrant community. While the initial period of intensive enforcement has subsided, continued public attention suggests that immigration enforcement may remain a focus, potentially affecting communities across all parts of Tennessee.

Efforts by government officials and law enforcement to address migrants involved with criminal gangs, human trafficking, and drug dealing are greatly appreciated. People involved in these illegal enterprises prey on both the larger immigrant community and all of society. Everyone, no matter their immigration status, should be protected from these bad actors.

A press release issued by ICE following the enforcement activity in Nashville spotlighted seven individuals with significant charges or convictions. The release noted that of the 196 individuals arrested, 95 had prior criminal convictions and pending criminal charges, and that 31 previously removed individuals had reentered the United States illegally.

Doing the math on the numbers presented in the ICE release, perhaps as many as 100 of those detained, while undocumented, apparently had no previous criminal issues. That brings into question whether the enforcement activity was principally targeted at those who should have no place in our communities because of their own illegal activity.

The fact that so many people without documentation could quietly live under the radar, often for decades, clearly points to the need for broad reform of the immigration system.

As we expressed in our statement released on December 28, 2024, the Feast of the Holy Family, when we joined the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky—united as the Metropolitan Province of Louisville—we reaffirm our prayerful support and unwavering solidarity with our immigrant sisters and brothers. Immigrants and their families are a cherished gift to our world.

In accordance with Catholic Social Teaching, the Church will continue to advocate for the dignity and just treatment of all migrants. We affirm both the right of individuals to migrate in order to support themselves and their families, and the right of nations to regulate their borders and establish migration policies. These rights, however, must be exercised in ways that uphold the dignity of every human being and serve the common good.

For decades, the Catholic Church in the United States and in Tennessee has called for comprehensive immigration reform—reform that includes:

- A strong border with immigration policies that allow for controlled migration enforced in a humane and just manner
- Support for family reunification
- Protections for those fleeing violence or persecution
- Access to legal representation and due process
- Pathways to legal status and citizenship

We recognize that fundamental human rights stem from the inherent dignity of being created in the image and likeness of God. We invite members of the Catholic community to deepen their understanding of immigration issues through the lens of the faith, and to advocate for humane and just immigration laws and policies.

We are particularly concerned by reports that recent enforcement efforts in the Nashville area have extended beyond individuals charged with serious crimes or those subject to final deportation orders. In the current climate, many individuals face a lack of due process, which contributes to widespread fear, especially the fear of being detained while simply attending Mass or participating in parish life.

As of June 2025, immigration policy at the southern U.S. border has seen significant changes under the Trump administration. Border security has been strengthened and attempted undocumented crossings are at historic lows. However, it is essential that efforts to address decades long shortcomings in immigration enforcement respect due process and the dignity of every person.

The Church stands ready to continue working with communities, legislators, and leaders to pursue immigration reform that reflects the values of justice, compassion, and human dignity. We invite all people of goodwill to join us in this vital mission.

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Most Reverend David P. Talley
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