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**In Letter To Migrants, Hispanic/Latino Catholic Bishops Express Solidarity, Prayers**

In a letter to migrants dated December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, thirty-three U.S. Hispanic/Latino Catholic bishops expressed their solidarity with and concern for undocumented immigrants in the United States.

“In your suffering faces we see the true face of Jesus Christ,” the bishops wrote. “We are well aware of the great sacrifice you make for your families’ well-being. Despite your contributions to the well-being of our country, instead of receiving our thanks, you are often treated as criminals because you have violated current immigration laws.”

The U.S. Catholic bishops have long advocated for changes in U.S. immigration laws, including the establishment of a path to citizenship for the estimated 11 million undocumented persons currently in the country. In their letter, the Hispanic Catholic bishops reaffirmed the commitment of the Church in the United States to advocate for just reform in U.S. immigration policy.

“Immigrants are a revitalizing force for our country. The lack of a just, humane and effective reform of immigration laws negatively affects the common good of the entire United States,” they wrote.

The Hispanic bishops also deplored the separation of immigrant families due to immigration enforcement actions across the nation.

“We are also very aware of the pain suffered by those families who have experienced the deportation of one of their members. We know of the anxiety of those whose application process for permanent residency is close to completion and of the anguish of those who live daily under the threat of deportation. This situation cries out to God for a worthy and humane solution,” they wrote.

The bishops, aware of the suffering incurred by persons who migrate illegally, asked migrants and their families to seriously consider whether it is more advisable to remain home rather than take the risk of migration until changes occur in U.S. immigration laws.

“As pastors concerned with your welfare, we ask you to consider whether it is advisable to undertake the journey here until after just and humane changes occur in our immigration laws,” they said.

However, the Hispanic bishops concluded with a message of hope to the migrants, promising their prayers and urging them to keep faith in God.

“We urge you not to despair. Keep faith in Jesus the migrant who continues to walk beside you,” they concluded. “May Almighty God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, accompany you and bless you always.”

Following, please find a copy of the letter in English and in Spanish.

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## **LETTER OF THE HISPANIC/LATINO BISHOPS TO IMMIGRANTS**

Dear immigrant sisters and brothers,

May the peace and grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you!

We the undersigned Hispanic/Latino Bishops of the United States wish to let those of you who lack proper authorization to live and work in our country know that you are not alone, or forgotten. We recognize that every human being, authorized or not, is an image of God and therefore possesses infinite value and dignity. We open our arms and hearts to you, and we receive you as members of our Catholic family. As pastors, we direct these words to you from the depths of our heart.

In a very special way we want to thank you for the Christian values you manifest to us with your lives—your sacrifice for the well-being of your families, your determination and perseverance, your joy of life, your profound faith and fidelity despite your insecurity and many difficulties. You contribute much to the welfare of our nation in the economic, cultural and spiritual arenas.

The economic crisis has had an impact on the entire U.S. community. Regretfully, some in reaction to this environment of uncertainty show disdain for immigrants and even blame them for the crisis. We will not find a solution to our problems by sowing hatred. We will find the solution by sowing a sense of solidarity among all workers and co-workers —immigrants and citizens—who live together in the United States.

In your suffering faces we see the true face of Jesus Christ. We are well aware of the great sacrifice you make for your families' well-being. Many of you perform the most difficult jobs and receive miserable salaries and no health insurance or social security. Despite your contributions to the well-being of our country, instead of receiving our thanks, you are often treated as criminals because you have violated current immigration laws.

We are also very aware of the pain suffered by those families who have experienced the deportation of one of their members. We are conscious of the frustration of youth and young adults who have grown up in this country and whose dreams are shattered because they lack legal immigration status. We also know of the anxiety of those whose application process for permanent residency is close to completion and of the anguish of those who live daily under the threat of deportation. This situation cries out to God for a worthy and humane solution.

We acknowledge that, at times, actions taken in regard to immigrants have made you feel ignored or abandoned, especially when no objection is raised to the false impressions that are promoted within our society. Through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops we have testified before the U.S. Congress for change in our immigration laws and for legislation that respects family unity and provides an orderly and reasonable process for unauthorized persons to attain citizenship. The new law should include a program for worker visas that respects the immigrants' human rights, provides for their basic needs and ensures that they enter our country and work in a safe and orderly manner. We will also continue to advocate on behalf of global economic justice, so that our brothers and sisters can find employment opportunities in their countries of origin that offer a living wage, and allow them to live with dignity.

Immigrants are a revitalizing force for our country. The lack of a just, humane and effective reform of immigration laws negatively affects the common good of the entire United States.

It pains and saddens us that many of our Catholic brothers and sisters have not supported our petitions for changes in the immigration law that will protect your basic rights while you contribute your hard work to our country. We promise to keep working to bring about this change. We know how difficult the journey is to reach the border and to enter the United States. That is why we are committed to do all that we can to bring about a change in the immigration law, so that you can enter and remain here legally and not feel compelled to undertake a dangerous journey in order to support and provide for your families. As pastors concerned for your welfare, we ask you to consider seriously whether it is advisable to undertake the journey here until after just and humane changes occur in our immigration laws.

Nevertheless, we are not going to wait until the law changes to welcome you who are already here into our churches, for as St. Paul tells us, "You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow-citizens with the holy people of God and part of God's household" (Eph 2:19).

As members of the Body of Christ which is the Church, we offer you spiritual nourishment. Feel welcome to Holy Mass, the Eucharist, which nourishes us with the word and the body and blood of Jesus. We offer you catechetical programs for your children and those religious education programs that our diocesan resources allow us to put at your disposal.

We who are citizens and permanent residents of this country cannot forget that almost all of us, we or our ancestors, have come from other lands and together with immigrants from various nations and cultures, have formed a new nation. Now we ought to open our hearts and arms to the recently arrived, just as Jesus asks us to do when he says, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was an alien and you took me into your house" (Mt 25:35). These words of the Lord Jesus can be applied to the new immigrants among us. They were hungry in their land of origin; they were thirsty as they traveled through the deserts, and they find themselves among us as aliens. (See Daniel G. Groody, CSC, "Crossing the Line," in *The Way*, Vol. 43., No. 2, April 2004, p. 58-69). Their presence challenges us to be more

courageous in denouncing the injustices they suffer. In imitation of Jesus and the great prophets we ought to denounce the forces that oppress them and announce the good news of the Kingdom with our works of charity. Let us pray and struggle to make it possible for these brothers and sisters of ours to have the same opportunities from which we have benefitted.

We see Jesus the pilgrim in you migrants. The Word of God migrated from heaven to earth in order to become man and save humanity. Jesus emigrated with Mary and Joseph to Egypt, as a refugee. He migrated from Galilee to Jerusalem for the sacrifice of the cross, and finally he emigrated from death to life in the resurrection and ascension to heaven. Today, he continues to journey and accompany all migrants on pilgrimage throughout the world in search of food, work, dignity, security and opportunities for the welfare of their families.

You reveal to us the supreme reality of life: we are all migrants. Your migration gives a strong and clear message that we are migrants on the way to eternal life. Jesus accompanies all Christians on our journey toward the house of our Father, God's Kingdom in heaven. (See Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, No. 50.)

We urge you not to despair. Keep faith in Jesus the migrant who continues to walk beside you. Have faith in Our Lady of Guadalupe who constantly repeats to us the words she spoke to St. Juan Diego, "Am I, who am your mother, not here?" She never abandons us, nor does St. Joseph who protects us as he did the Holy Family during their emigration to Egypt.

As pastors we want to continue to do advocacy for all immigrants. With St. Paul we say to you: "Do not be mastered by evil; but master evil with good." (Rm 12:21).

May Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, accompany you and bless you always.

Sincerely in Christ our Savior,

The Hispanic/Latino Bishops of the United States

Most Rev. José H. Gómez  
Archbishop of Los Angeles

Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller, MSPS  
Archbishop of San Antonio

Most Rev. Gerald R. Barnes  
Bishop of San Bernardino

Most Rev. Alvaro Corrada del Rio, SJ  
Apostolic Administrator of Tyler  
Bishop of Mayaguez, PR

Most Rev. Felipe de Jesús Estevez  
Bishop of St. Augustine

Most Rev. Richard J. García  
Bishop of Monterey

Most Rev. Armando X. Ochoa  
Apostolic Administrator of El Paso  
Bishop-designate of Fresno

Most Rev. Plácido Rodríguez, CMF  
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Most Rev. Alexander Salazar  
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Most Rev. Octavio Cisneros, DD  
Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn

Most. Rev. Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV  
Auxiliary Bishop of Newark

Most Rev. Cirilo B. Flores  
Auxiliary Bishop of Orange

Most Rev. Josu Iriondo  
Auxiliary Bishop of New York

Most Rev. Alberto Rojas  
Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago

Most Rev. Luis Rafael Zarama  
Auxiliary Bishop of Atlanta

Most Rev. Gabino Zavala  
Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles

*Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe  
December 12, 2011*



## **CARTA DE LOS OBISPOS HISPANOS/LATINOS A LOS INMIGRANTES**

Muy estimados hermanas y hermanos inmigrantes,

¡Que la paz y la gracia de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo estén con todos ustedes!

Nosotros los obispos hispanos/latinos de Estados Unidos abajo firmantes les hacemos saber a quienes se encuentran en nuestro país sin papeles que no están solos ni olvidados. Reconocemos que todo ser humano, documentado o no, es imagen de Dios y por lo tanto tiene un valor y dignidad infinitos. Les abrimos nuestros brazos y nuestro corazón y los recibimos como miembros de nuestra familia católica. Como pastores, les dirigimos estas palabras desde lo más profundo de nuestro corazón.

De una manera muy especial queremos agradecerles los valores cristianos que nos demuestran con su vida – el sacrificio por el bien de sus familias, la determinación y perseverancia, el gozo de vivir, su profunda fe y su fidelidad a pesar de la inseguridad y tantas dificultades. Ustedes contribuyen mucho al bienestar de nuestra nación en el ámbito económico, cultural y espiritual.

La crisis económica ha impactado a toda la comunidad estadounidense. Lamentablemente, algunos aprovechan este ambiente de incertidumbre para despreciar al migrante y aun culparlo por esta crisis. Sembrar el odio no nos lleva a remediar la crisis. Encontraremos el remedio en la solidaridad entre todos los trabajadores y colaboradores—inmigrantes y ciudadanos—que conviven en los Estados Unidos.

En sus rostros sufrientes vemos el rostro verdadero de Jesucristo. Sabemos muy bien el gran sacrificio que hacen por el bien de sus familias. Muchos de ustedes hacen los trabajos más difíciles, con sueldos miserables y sin seguro de salud o prestaciones salariales o sociales. A pesar de sus contribuciones al bienestar de nuestro país, en lugar de ofrecerles gratitud, se les trata como criminales porque han violado la ley de inmigración actual.

Estamos también muy conscientes del dolor de las familias que han sufrido la deportación de alguno de sus miembros; de la frustración de los jóvenes que han crecido en este país y cuyos sueños son truncados por su estatus migratorio; de la ansiedad de aquellos que están en espera de la aprobación de su petición de residencia permanente; y de la angustia de quienes viven cada día bajo la amenaza de ser deportados. Todas estas situaciones claman a Dios por una solución digna y humana.

Reconocemos que en ocasión las acciones tomadas con respecto a los inmigrantes les ha llevado a sentirse ignorados y abandonados, incluyendo cuando no se han escuchado voces que se levanten ante las falsedades que se promueven dentro de nuestra sociedad. Por medio de la Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Estados Unidos (USCCB) hemos abogado ante el Congreso estadounidense por un cambio a la ley de inmigración que respete la unidad de la familia, e incluya pasos ordenados y razonables para que personas sin documentos puedan obtener la ciudadanía. La nueva ley deberá incluir un programa de visas para trabajadores que respete los derechos humanos de los inmigrantes, les provea las necesidades básicas para vivir y facilite su ingreso a nuestro país para trabajar en un ambiente seguro y ordenado. Así mismo, continuamos abogando por la justicia económica global que facilite el empleo de nuestros hermanos y hermanas en su tierra de origen y les provea lo suficiente para vivir con dignidad.

El pueblo inmigrante es una fuerza revitalizadora para el país. La falta de una reforma migratoria justa, humana y eficaz debilita el bien común de toda la unión americana.

Nos duele y nos apena que muchos de nuestros hermanos y hermanas católicos no hayan apoyado nuestras peticiones por un cambio a la ley de inmigración que proteja sus derechos, mientras ustedes contribuyen con su trabajo a nuestro país. Les prometemos que seguiremos trabajando para obtener este cambio. Conocemos lo difícil que es el camino para llegar y para entrar a Estados Unidos. Por eso estamos comprometidos a hacer lo que podamos para lograr un cambio de ley que les permita entrar y vivir en este país legalmente, y no se vean ustedes obligados a emprender un camino peligroso para proveer a sus familias. Como pastores que se preocupan por el bienestar de todos ustedes, les debemos decir que consideren seriamente si es aconsejable emprender su camino hacia acá antes de que se logre un cambio justo y humano en las leyes de inmigración.

Sin embargo, no vamos a esperar hasta que cambie la ley para darles la bienvenida en nuestras iglesias a los que ya están aquí, ya que San Pablo nos dice, “Ustedes ya no son extranjeros ni huéspedes, sino conciudadanos de los que forman el pueblo de Dios; son familia de Dios” (Ef. 2:19).

Como miembros del Cuerpo de Cristo que es la Iglesia, les ofrecemos alimento espiritual. Siéntanse bienvenidos a la Santa Misa, la Eucaristía que nos alimenta con la palabra y con el cuerpo y la sangre de Jesús. Les ofrecemos programas de catequesis para sus hijos, y los programas de formación que nuestros esfuerzos diocesanos nos permiten poner a su alcance.

Los ciudadanos y residentes permanentes de este país no podemos olvidar que casi todos, nosotros o nuestros antepasados, hemos venido de otras tierras, y juntos con inmigrantes de varias naciones y culturas hemos formado una nueva nación. Ahora debemos abrirles el corazón y los brazos a los recién llegados, como nos lo pide Jesús cuando nos dice, “Tuve hambre y ustedes me alimentaron; tuve sed y ustedes me dieron de beber; pasé como forastero y ustedes me recibieron en su casa” (Mt 25:35). Estas palabras del Señor Jesús se pueden aplicar a los inmigrantes entre nosotros. Tuvieron hambre en su tierra de origen, tuvieron sed al pasar por el desierto, y se encuentran entre nosotros como forasteros (ver Daniel G. Groody, CSC, “Crossing the Line,” *The Way*, Vol. 43, No.2, abril 2004, p.58-69). Su presencia nos invita a ser más valientes en la denuncia de las injusticias que sufren. A imitación de Jesús y de los grandes

profetas, debemos denunciar las fuerzas que los oprimen, y anunciar la buena nueva del Reino con nuestras obras de caridad. Oremos y luchemos para que estos hermanos y hermanas nuestras tengan las mismas oportunidades de las cuales nosotros nos hemos beneficiado.

Vemos en ustedes migrantes a Jesús peregrino. La Palabra de Dios migró del cielo a la tierra para hacerse hombre y salvar a la humanidad. Jesús emigró con María y José a Egipto, como refugiado. Migró de Galilea a Jerusalén para el sacrificio de la Cruz, y finalmente emigró de la muerte a la resurrección y ascendió al cielo. Hoy día, sigue caminando y acompañando a todos los migrantes que peregrinan por el mundo en búsqueda de alimento, trabajo, dignidad, seguridad y oportunidades para el bien de sus familias.

Ustedes nos revelan la realidad suprema de la vida: todos somos migrantes. Su migración es un fuerte y claro mensaje de que todos somos migrantes hacia la vida eterna. Jesús nos acompaña a todos los cristianos en nuestro peregrinar hacia la casa del Padre, el reino de Dios en el cielo (Ver *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* No. 50).

Les rogamos que no se desesperen. Mantengan su fe en Jesús migrante que sigue caminando con ustedes, y en la Santísima Virgen de Guadalupe que constantemente nos repite las palabras dichas a san Juan Diego, “¿No estoy yo aquí que soy tu Madre?” Ella nunca nos abandona, ni nos abandona san José quien nos protege como lo hizo con la Sagrada Familia durante su emigración a Egipto.

Como pastores queremos seguir abogando por todos los inmigrantes. Con san Pablo les repetimos: “No se dejen vencer por el mal; antes bien, venzan el mal con la fuerza del bien” (Rom. 12:21).

Que Dios todopoderoso, Padre, Hijo y Espíritu Santo los acompañe y los bendiga siempre.

Sinceramente en Cristo Salvador,

Los Obispos Hispanos/Latinos de Estados Unidos

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Archbishop of Los Angeles

Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller, MSpS  
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Most Rev. Gerald R. Barnes  
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*Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe  
Diciembre 12, 2011*