

Boise bishop urges Catholics to recognize Christ in every immigrant

BOISE, Idaho - Boise Bishop Michael P. Driscoll, in a pastoral statement on immigration, called on the people and parishes of his diocese "to recognize Christ in the person of every immigrant and to proclaim the church's message of hope and welcome in our local communities."

"I challenge all parishes and individual Catholics to pray for and with all those affected by this (immigration) crisis, to become educated on the reality of immigration in our country, to work for the creation of a just and realistic immigration policy," the bishop wrote.

He issued his pastoral June 4, three days before immigration reform legislation was stalled in the U.S. Senate. A procedural vote intended to bring the bill to a vote failed June 7.

After the vote, Bishop Driscoll urged Catholics in Idaho to write their senators urging them to pass immigration reform legislation.

"As Catholics, we should be supportive of immigration reform," he told the Idaho Catholic Register, newspaper of the statewide Boise Diocese.

In his pastoral he said that "for the Catholic Church immigration is not a political issue, but a fundamental moral issue which impacts human rights, human life and human dignity."

"Because of this, we implore our national legislators to reform current immigration policy in a way that protects our national security, respects our common humanity and reflects the principles of justice upon which our country was built," he wrote.

Bishop Driscoll echoed points that had been previously outlined by the U.S. bishops about immigration reform, saying it should include a fair and realistic pathway to citizenship and should allow family members to remain united. He also called for the reform of an employment-based system and due process protection for immigrants.

The bishop acknowledged that the church's teaching "may be at odds" with popular sentiment, but said that Catholic social teaching compels believers to work for change.

But he said, "We stand firmly with our faith tradition which calls us to protect human life and dignity, to serve the poor, the vulnerable and the stranger in our midst and to challenge unjust public policies."

Immigrants have played a key role in the development of this country, Bishop Driscoll said. "From the earliest days, our nation has been a nation of immigrants. ... Yet today, we find ourselves at a critical juncture regarding our openness to newcomers."

"Our common faith in Jesus Christ implores us to 'hunger and thirst for justice' and to 'welcome the strangers' among us as our neighbors," he wrote. "In light of this Gospel mandate, we can do no less! It is my hope, and that of many other people of faith, that our hearts will become more open to the plight of the immigrant and that our elected federal officials will enact comprehensive reforms which are humane, realistic and responsible."

The day after a June 12 immigration raid on a produce plant in Portland, Ore., Archbishop John G. Vlazny of Portland issued a statement calling the action "an affront to a nation whose tradition has always welcomed the stranger in search of the security and livelihood which he cannot find in the country of his origin."

The archbishop noted the stress and turmoil such raids place on the family members of those arrested and encouraged "Catholic parishes and individuals to offer assistance and support to families that have been affected by this raid."

In an article that appeared in the June 4 edition of America magazine, Carl Anderson, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, said Americans must embrace each other as brothers and sisters in faith regardless of their ethnic background.

Although he did not take a position on current immigration legislation before Congress, Anderson noted the rising number of Hispanic Catholics in the United

States and said that as they “breathe new life into our parish communities” Catholics should help them become assimilated into parishes and communities.

“If we Catholics were to view Hispanic immigrants as brothers and sisters in faith, and if we were to share that vision with the rest of our country we could significantly shape the future of the church, the country, the continent and the hemisphere,” he wrote in the national Catholic weekly published by Jesuits.