Opinion
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As a priest and missionary, you could say it's part of my job description to cross borders. Whether it's an actual concrete fence or the divides of race and language that often separate us from each other, the Christian approaches a border with the eyes of faith. God unites and breaks down barriers, asking us to move beyond our comfort zones to encounter "the other."

I recently traveled to El Paso, Texas, on the U.S. border with Mexico. Along with more than a dozen Catholic priests from around the country, I came to listen, learn from, and stand with immigrants at a time when our government is targeting them with inhumane policies that leave families separated and communities shattered.

Members of the clergy delegation, led by the advocacy group Faith in Public Life, returned to our dioceses and parishes determined to become even stronger voices for families who live in fear. The challenge we face now is urgent.

There are more than 12,000 immigrant children in detention centers, five times more than last year. Two hundred children are still separated from their families. As Catholics and faithful citizens, we have a responsibility to speak out. Cynicism and despair are not options for disciples of Jesus, who taught us that our neighbor isn't only the person who speaks the same language as us or those who live nearby. All immigrants, regardless of legal status, are beloved in the eyes of God.

Congress is now negotiating a budget with a deadline at the end of this month. The Trump administration wants billions more in additional funding for detention.

Immigrant children belong with their parents and in communities, not in cages.

We need to preach this message not only from our pulpits and in our communities, but also to our elected representatives.

Given the urgency of budget debates over increased detention funding, I will be joining the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, Faith in Public Life and other faith-based groups engaging in a week of action this week. Along with praying for immigrants and getting to know immigrants in your community, I urge you to call your member of Congress.

We lift our voices not as Democrats or Republicans, but as Catholics. We call with a clear moral message: Immigrant families belong together. Funding for increased detention will only tear more families apart. Along with calling your representative, you can also join or organize an interfaith vigil that will help express the shared value held across religious traditions that immigrants are to be respected and protected.

During my time on the border, I visited Annunciation House, a place of hospitality for immigrants. “What I’m asking you to do is use your voice, use your pulpit, and stand up for immigrants and say what we’re doing is wrong,” Ruben Garcia, the director of the house told us. “The only way I can describe the totality of what is being done to immigrants is a conscientious effort to eliminate an entire group of people.”

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Six hundred immigrants and refugees each week come to Annunciation House, Garcia told us, including a man who arrived just recently with the soles of his feet burned off from walking several days through the desert without shoes.

In the many decades of doing this ministry, Garcia said he has never seen things so difficult for immigrants as they are now.

Our delegation also visited Casa del Migrante in Juarez, Mexico, across the border. I was struck by how easy it was for those of us with documentation to cross over given the perilous journeys so many make in search of jobs, security, and basic human dignity. There are no borders or walls for God.

“A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not a Christian,” Pope Francis has said.

As Christians, we can’t sit on the sidelines when politicians demonize immigrants and pass policies that separate families. I pray that you will join me in taking action.

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