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Alejandra Molina

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Roman Catholic Archbishop José H. Gomez delivered a message of unity at a Mass dedicated to immigrants Sept. 7, urging Catholics to pray for those who are "trying to cause division in our country."

Speaking in English and Spanish to the hundreds of people gathered at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Gomez challenged them to talk to those "who disagree with us" and to "see things through their eyes."

"For many years now, I've been saying that immigration is not just a political issue, it is a spiritual issue," Gomez said. "Immigration is not only about borders between nations, it's about overcoming barriers in the human heart … and accepting others."

But Gomez made clear that the Mass had political goals as well. "What a beautiful gift it would be if each one of us would start to pray the rosary everyday for the healing of our country, for changes of our hearts … That will bring for sure comprehensive immigration reform," Gomez said.

The Los Angeles archdiocese has hosted the Mass in Recognition of All Immigrants, held in collaboration with the Dioceses of Orange, San Bernardino and San Diego, since 2012.

During Mass, dozens of people — from lawyers and translators to artists and activists — were recognized for their work in helping immigrants. Filmmaker Gregory Nava, who directed "El Norte," a 1983 movie about Guatemalan siblings who flee persecution and trek through Mexico to start a life in the U.S. — was among those recognized. So was Angelica Salas, who heads the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights, or CHIRLA, an immigrant rights group that serves Southern California.

Congregants prayed in a number of languages, including Tagalog and Vietnamese, for Syrian refugees and for families separated by borders. Attendees were largely Latino, but Korean, Filipino, and Vietnamese parishioners were also there.

The crowd also heard testimony from Daniela Luna, 20, who immigrated to the U.S. as an unaccompanied minor.

Luna detailed the circumstances that led her and her younger sibling to leave their hometown in Durango, in central Mexico, about four years ago to reunite with their mother, who was working in the U.S.

She said they saw no option but to leave after her father abandoned them, and traveled hundreds of miles to the border in Tijuana, she said. She eventually turned herself in to immigration officials and was separated from brother and sent back to Mexico. After crossing again on her own and making contact with immigration officials, she said she wound up in a cold room known as "the freezer" with other women and young girls. She said she spent days in a detention center in Arizona.

Luna eventually reunited with her brother and mother in Los Angeles and has graduated from a Catholic high school through the help of a scholarship the archdiocese helped arrange. Luna received legal representation through an immigration task force that includes the four dioceses in Southern California.

"I hope I can help other people with my story … to not give up and have faith," she said.

Some non-Catholics, such as Nancy Figueroa, 28, attended the Mass out of concern for immigrants. Figueroa said it was important to recognize immigrants at a time

when President Donald Trump demonizes the community. She said her parents are immigrants from Guatemala and Bolivia.

Figueroa was raised Christian but said she is exploring Catholicism.

"Connecting with God, it brings peace with everything that's happening right now," she said. "It brings hope that everything will get better."

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