News



Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, delivers his homily during the welcome Mass at the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering in Washington Jan. 25, 2025. (OSV News/courtesy of USCCB Secretariat of Justice and Peace)



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In the U.S. capital, abuzz with a whirlwind of executive actions from the new Trump administration, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the apostolic nuncio to the United States, had a message to share from Pope Francis.

"Do not be afraid to continue being 'protagonists of history,' working together 'body to body, person to person' as part of the 'great human family' that makes up the entire American continent," said Pierre, reading the pope's words from a letter to the hundreds of attendees at the opening general session of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' 2025 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering.

Francis' dispatch to the CSMG recalled the current Jubilee Year, emphasizing it as "an opportunity to place the challenge of 'organizing hope' at the center of the pastoral mission."

"This is what it is all about: being a 'Church which goes forth,' being able to sustain 'with words and actions' the hope with which so many families have always come to these blessed lands," Francis said in his letter.

The pope also praised attendees' diligent work for justice, saying he knows of their committed efforts "to recognize Jesus Christ in those most in need: the excluded, the discarded, the poor, the migrants."

Without social justice, Francis said in his letter, "we will not be able to guarantee the dignity of every person, of every child who comes into this world, of every hopeful young person who sets foot in the Americas."

Perhaps the largest U.S. assembly of those dedicated to carrying out the social ministry and teaching of the church, the biennial Catholic Social Ministry Gathering takes place Jan. 25-28 in Washington, a day after the national March for Life.

Christened this year with the theme, "Missionaries of Hope, Advocates for Justice," the CSMG is organized by the USCCB's Secretariat of Justice and Peace, 10 USCCB departments, and 20 national Catholic organizations.

The opening plenary — presented with the same title theme as the gathering itself — is designed to set the tone for the days that follow, which are crammed with sessions examining the varied concerns of Catholic social teaching: immigration and refugees; poverty and homelessness; human trafficking and climate change; global conflict and debt; and more.

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In his plenary address, Pierre recalled Francis' September 2015 speech to the U.S. Congress, when the pontiff invoked the witness of American citizens as President Abraham Lincoln, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day and Father Thomas Merton.

"The four people whom the pope highlighted were people who followed their prophetic vocation in Christ. That is what we are called to do — especially when we carry out Catholic social ministry," said Pierre.

"What does it mean to be a prophet?" he asked. "We are prophets when we announce — by our actions and our words — the truth that will transform society: Namely, that God loves his people, and that he desires all people to experience their dignity as his children, as well as solidarity with one another, as brothers and sisters in the human family."

This prophetic message, said Pierre, is shared with the world both through social ministry and political involvement.

In the arena of politics, however, Pierre cautioned against the lure of politicians who allege to have all the answers.

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"As Christians," said Pierre, "our politics must look different than this."

"There are many expressions of injustice that affect people," he said. "For this reason, there are many specific areas in which Catholic social ministry is necessary to bring about greater justice."

Noting the CSMG theme "Missionaries of Hope; Advocates for Justice," the papal ambassador stressed it implies "an inseparable link between justice and hope. A simple way of understanding who are the poor is to say a poor person is anyone who is being deprived of justice."

Pierre next proposed three areas of focus for Catholic social ministry: the abolition of the death penalty; an end to war; and the just treatment of migrants and refugees.

While praising President Joe Biden's Dec. 23 decision to commute the sentences of 37 federal death row inmates less than a month before his departure from office, Pierre also cited the work and statements of the Catholic Mobilizing Network.

"This was a promising sign that the movement against the death penalty continues to grow," he said. "Please God, we will one day live in a country where the killing of those convicted of crimes is not mistaken for justice, and where there are no exceptions."

On Jan. 20, however, Trump signed an executive order to resume the federal death penalty and expand its usage.

Remarking that the just-concluded March for Life is a powerful witness in American society, Pierre added, "It is important that our pro-life focus encompass the whole spectrum of life." This included the lives of people convicted of serious crimes.

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Saying it is the poor who suffer the most from conflict, Pierre declared, "War will never be the answer to differences between peoples and nations."

Nonetheless, he acknowledged its specter may seem overwhelming.

"We may look at the eradication of war as something beyond our ability, or greater than the scope of the mission to which our various apostolates are committed. But we can all do two things at least," Pierre suggested. "We can pray to end the war," he said, and change our own attitudes by realizing that, "We can no longer afford to assume that war is inevitable."

While quoting Francis' statements that migrants and refugees possess inherent human dignity and bring both strengths and talents to their new homes, Pierre had sharp words for the U.S. approach to immigration.

"The broken system around migration which has existed in this country for some time is a glaring example of the effects of political polarization. Many people — no matter their party affiliation — can recognize the need of national security," he said, "while at the same time acknowledging the duty of every human society to care for the dignity and well-being of people, who are pressured by unjust conditions to leave their homeland and seek security elsewhere.

"No person of goodwill — let alone a Christian — can argue," declared Pierre, "with such basic human values."

A vigil Mass followed a Q&A session after the plenary address, with Pierre as celebrant.

The cardinal preached on Luke 4:14-21 — the Gospel reading in which Jesus declares Isaiah's words that the Lord "has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives." Pierre reminded his listeners that Francis designated Jan. 26 as Sunday of the Word of God.

"We get to hear the core message of the Gospel — and 2,000 years later, we are the recipients of this saving Good News, which Christ has ratified through his death and resurrection," said Pierre.

"What Jesus said in the synagogue in Nazareth remains our mission statement as disciples of Jesus," he said. "We are called and equipped ... to do the very same

things that Jesus announced He had come to do: To give hope to the poor, and justice to the oppressed."

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.