News



Bishop Peter Baldacchino of Las Cruces, N.M.; Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio; Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, Texas; and Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, N.M., lead a march in El Paso March 24, 2025, against mass deportations by the U.S. government. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

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Mass deportations and asylum bans — part of the Trump administration's rapid changes to U.S. immigration policy — destroy communities and human dignity, while constituting a "war on the poor," said Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, Texas.

The bishop — who chairs the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration — shared his thoughts during a March 24 prayer vigil at Sacred Heart Church in El Paso, which capped a rally and march that began in the city's downtown San Jacinto Plaza.

"Aquí Estamos: March and Vigil to Stand with Migrants" drew hundreds of participants, including immigration advocates, Catholic and interfaith clergy, religious and lay faithful.

The gathering, spoken in English and Spanish throughout, was attended by Catholic prelates from the U.S., Canada and Mexico, including Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio; Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico; Bishop Peter Baldacchino of Las Cruces, New Mexico; Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky; and Bishop Noël Simard of Valleyfield, Quebec.

Also on hand was Cardinal Fabio Baggio of Bassano del Grappa, Italy, the undersecretary of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

Speaking in Spanish, Baggio invited attendees at the vigil to pray for "all the victims of the different migratory routes" in the world, from Africa and Asia to Europe and the U.S.

"Thousands and thousands of brothers and sisters who, simply looking for a better future or refuge, lost their way," he said in lament.

According to the United Nations' International Organization for Migration, 2024 was the deadliest year on record for migrants, with at least 8,938 perishing on migration

routes.

The El Paso rally, march and vigil — organized by Seitz in partnership with Hope Border Institute, an El Paso-based immigrant advocacy nonprofit — took place on the feast of St. Óscar Romero, the martyred archbishop of San Salvador known for his fierce defense of human rights and the marginalized in El Salvador.

The rally's timing was "no accident," especially as such rights have become increasingly endangered amid an "attack on immigrants today," Seitz said in his address at the vigil.

The denial of asylum and the threat of mass deportations represent "a fundamental attack on the human community" and on "Jesus' vision of a fully reconciled humanity," he said. "Mass deportations are another tool to keep people afraid, to keep a people divided, to extinguish the charity and love that keep a people alive."

Catholic social teaching on immigration holds that people have the right to migrate to sustain their lives, while nations have the right to regulate their borders and control immigration, although they must do so with both justice and mercy.

But speakers at the rally pointed to recent U.S. immigration policy changes as exceeding those moral parameters, and instead eroding human rights and fostering division.

Ruben Garcia, founder and executive director of Annunciation House — an El Paso shelter that has hosted over 500,000 people fleeing more than 40 countries for nearly five decades — pointed to recent letters sent by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to organizations receiving shelter grant money. The notices require "a detailed and descriptive list of specific services," and compel executive officers from the groups to sign sworn statements they have no knowledge or suspicions of staff violating smuggling laws.

Children are not spared in the administration's crackdown on immigration, said attorney Melissa Lopez, executive director of the Diocese of El Paso's Estrella del Paso (formerly Migrant and Refugee Services), which provides free immigration legal services.

Lopez advised the crowd her office had received notice March 21 the federal government had terminated its contract with the Acacia Center for Justice, which provides legal services to unaccompanied migrant minors through a national

network of providers, including Lopez's team.

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"The federal government has decided that children should go to court by themselves, that children should be forced to understand asylum law and apply for asylum on their own, and that they don't deserve ... having somebody stand alongside them," she said. Lopez added that she lost 18 staff at her agency — which served "almost 30,000 children last year" — due to the contract termination.

Dylan Corbett, executive director of Hope Border Institute, described the current immigration climate as "difficult" and a "dark moment." He told rally attendees that "everything that is beautiful about this community" on the border "is under attack right now."

But Seitz also emphasized, "We are here tonight to celebrate our community."

Participants embraced that spirit through praise and worship music, as well as through religious dance troupes honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Jude and St. Patrick, with choreography, drumming and costumes reflecting the area's Catholic Indigenous and Mexican-Spanish heritage.

"El Paso is a proud and beautiful border community" that "stands as a testament to how welcoming others fosters a safe, prosperous and vibrant environment for all," said El Paso Auxiliary Bishop Anthony Celino.

At the rally, Celino invited those present to affirm the six principles of the Compromiso El Paso 2025 ("El Paso Commitment 2025"). Attendees could digitally sign the Compromiso El Paso through a Google Doc link accessed by cards with a QR code and Romero's image, provided by Hope Border Institute.

The principles include human dignity; family; community safety built on collaboration and trust between residents and law enforcement; prosperity; fairness through "humane ... responsible immigration policies"; and "celebration of our heritage," said Celino.

Following the rally, participants — some holding signs stating "Jesus was an immigrant" and "Migration is a human right" — walked the half mile from the plaza

to the vigil at Sacred Heart Church, led by Seitz and his fellow prelates and preceded by the drummers and dancers.

"Community is an exchange of gifts, where we gift our lives to one another for the benefit of one another," Seitz said at the vigil. "We grow together and we bear one another's burdens."

Christ offered himself in sacrifice — one to which Romero, through his own martyrdom, united himself — for "that body" that is divinely created humanity, said Seitz.

"We belong to one another, brothers and sisters," he said. "We belong to each other."

That interrelatedness extends well beyond the borders of the U.S., said Seitz.

"Migration is connected with the fate of our country," he said. "Our relationship to this issue as El Paso and as the United States reveals what we truly value, what we truly honor. Hopefully, we put our faith not in money and power and rivalry and dominance and empire. This would be idolatry of the worst sort."

At the border, "we see that (in) this war on the poor, everything is disposable — land, water, environment, our health, women ... marriages, the unborn, the poor, human rights," said Seitz.

Jesus "points us in a different direction," Seitz said. "True, authentic community is built on self-sacrifice, love, and bearing one another's burdens. ... This is what the church, the beloved community, must be in the world. And we must be a sign to them."

Seitz assured all those "who live in fear of deportation and family separation" of "our love and commitment," stressing that "the church stands with you in this hour of darkness.

"And to those in a position of responsibility for our country who steward the common good, I make this urgent plea," he said before raising his voice. "Stop the asylum ban. Stop the deportations."

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