News



Franciscan Fr. Juan de la Cruz Turcios, Russ Testa, Dominique Njinkeu and Mary Rein prepare to deliver letters (held by Njinkeu) to members of Congress June 26, 2025, seeking protection for immigrants, on behalf of St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland. (NCR photo/Patricia Zapor)



by Patricia Zapor

View Author Profile

## Join the Conversation

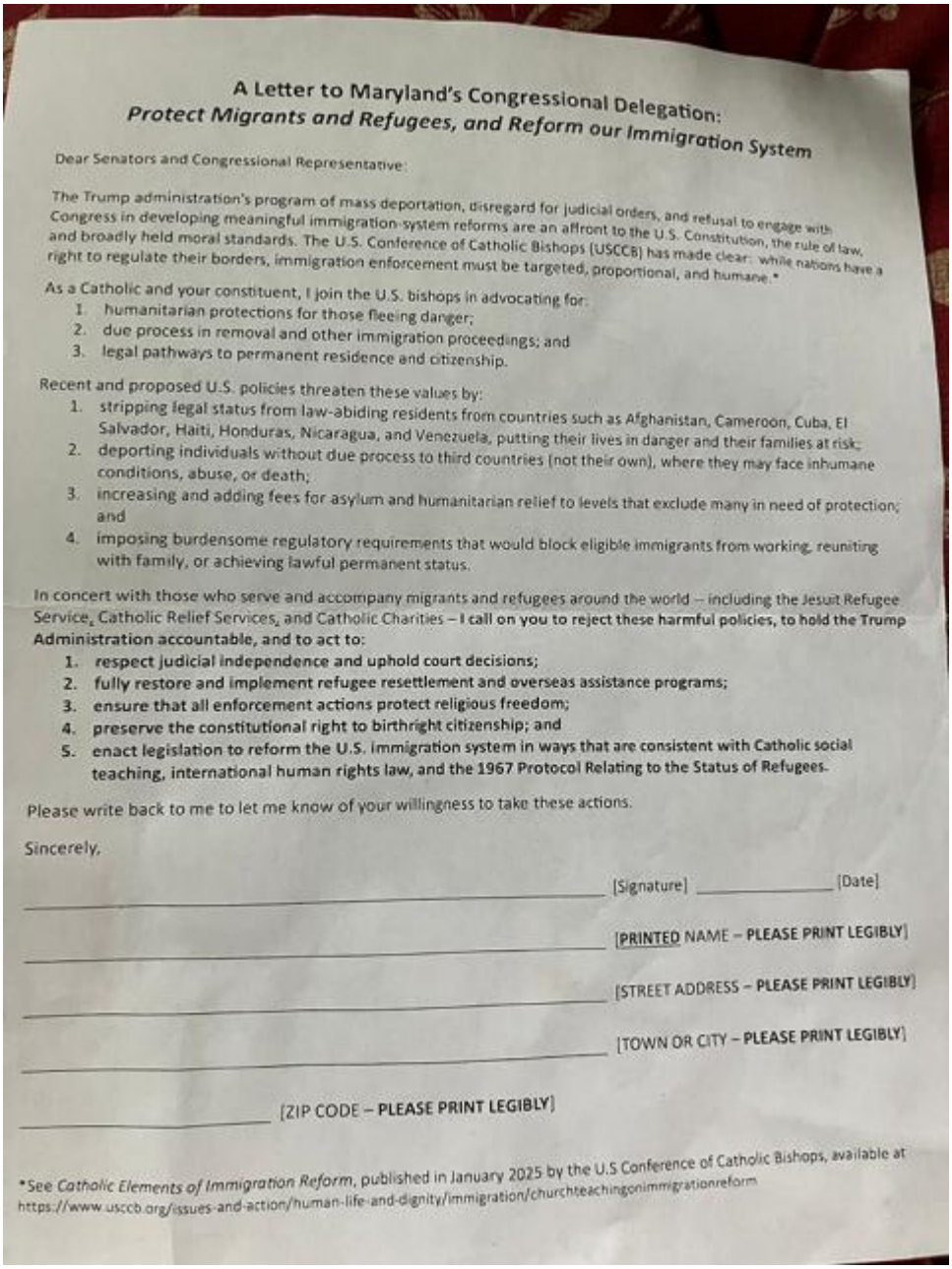
Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Washington — July 10, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

On a blisteringly hot day in late June, half a dozen parishioners from a suburban Maryland Catholic church trekked across Capitol Hill midday to deliver a message to their members of Congress.

The group was from St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, where a letter-writing campaign is one way the parish is responding to immigration deportation threats from the Trump administration, reflecting action nationwide on this issue from parishes, dioceses and community groups.

The hundreds of individually signed letters that the parishioners delivered June 26 called on senators and members of Congress from Maryland and a handful of other jurisdictions to reject "harmful policies" that threaten migrants and refugees.



**A Letter to Maryland's Congressional Delegation:**
***Protect Migrants and Refugees, and Reform our Immigration System***

Dear Senators and Congressional Representative:

The Trump administration's program of mass deportation, disregard for judicial orders, and refusal to engage with Congress in developing meaningful immigration system reforms are an affront to the U.S. Constitution, the rule of law, and broadly held moral standards. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has made clear: while nations have a right to regulate their borders, immigration enforcement must be targeted, proportional, and humane.*

As a Catholic and your constituent, I join the U.S. bishops in advocating for:

1. humanitarian protections for those fleeing danger;
2. due process in removal and other immigration proceedings; and
3. legal pathways to permanent residence and citizenship.

Recent and proposed U.S. policies threaten these values by:

1. stripping legal status from law-abiding residents from countries such as Afghanistan, Cameroon, Cuba, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, putting their lives in danger and their families at risk;
2. deporting individuals without due process to third countries (not their own), where they may face inhumane conditions, abuse, or death;
3. increasing and adding fees for asylum and humanitarian relief to levels that exclude many in need of protection; and
4. imposing burdensome regulatory requirements that would block eligible immigrants from working, reuniting with family, or achieving lawful permanent status.

In concert with those who serve and accompany migrants and refugees around the world – including the Jesuit Refugee Service, Catholic Relief Services, and Catholic Charities – **I call on you to reject these harmful policies, to hold the Trump Administration accountable, and to act to:**

1. **respect judicial independence and uphold court decisions;**
2. **fully restore and implement refugee resettlement and overseas assistance programs;**
3. **ensure that all enforcement actions protect religious freedom;**
4. **preserve the constitutional right to birthright citizenship; and**
5. **enact legislation to reform the U.S. immigration system in ways that are consistent with Catholic social teaching, international human rights law, and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.**

Please write back to me to let me know of your willingness to take these actions.

Sincerely,

_____ [Signature] _____ [Date]

_____ [PRINTED NAME – **PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY**]

_____ [STREET ADDRESS – **PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY**]

_____ [TOWN OR CITY – **PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY**]

_____ [ZIP CODE – **PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY**]

*See *Catholic Elements of Immigration Reform*, published in January 2025 by the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops, available at https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/churchteachingonimmigrationreform

Blank copy of sample letter delivered to members of Congress June 26, 2025, by members of St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland (NCR photo/Patricia Zapor)

The letters also asked the legislators to "hold the Trump administration accountable" and act to:

- Respect judicial independence and uphold court decisions;
- Fully restore refugee resettlement and overseas assistance programs;
- Preserve the constitutional right to birthright citizenship;
- Ensure that enforcement action protects religious freedom;

- Reform the U.S. immigration system, consistent with Catholic social teaching and international human rights law.

For some making these deliveries, it was their first time doing advocacy on Capitol Hill. For others, it was a familiar trek. The team made stops in two Senate office buildings and two on the House side. Most deliveries were simple handoffs to a staff member. In a couple of cases, the group was greeted by the chief of staff for the member being visited.

Mary Rein was one of the first-timers visiting the congressional offices. Despite the long, hot walk and the low-key interactions with legislators' staff members, Rein said she felt the effort was useful. She was also surprised by how many people the group encountered making similar visits.

Most lobbyists that day were part of an organized effort to preserve funding for Medicaid in the budget bill then under consideration in the Senate. Some wore shirts identifying themselves as part of CASA, which advocates for immigrants. Others wore badges indicating they were doctors or nurses; some wore stethoscopes around their necks.

"I've been impressed by how many people are here for Medicaid. It makes me feel encouraged just to see the people here," Rein told the National Catholic Reporter.

John Holden, who helped organize the letter campaign and the delivery delegation, has been to the halls of Congress numerous times for other advocacy work. He cited a quote from Pope Francis's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* as guiding such efforts: "We need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family living in a common home."

Franciscan Fr. Juan de la Cruz Turcios, parochial vicar at St. Camillus Parish, had been in Washington just a week before with a group marking World Refugee Day by protesting policies outside the White House.



Franciscan Fr. Juan de la Cruz Turcios, parochial vicar of St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, is joined by parishioners as he hands letters seeking protection for immigrants to Jeremy Hekhuis, chief of staff to Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., June 26, 2025. (NCR photo/Patricia Zapor)

He said that as an immigrant who arrived from El Salvador as a teenager, he has always felt welcome in the United States. "But in the last few months, I think things have changed in the world."

He said he looks at the multicultural St. Camillus congregation and sees a beautiful mix of people from everywhere. "We have those who are able to live and work without fear, including some who make the laws. On the other hand, we have the ones who are migrants, who also are a part of our community," but they struggle to support their families.

"We are all the body of Christ," he said, saying that if even the little finger of that body suffers, so do all those who make up the body.

"Everyone has to feel that pain," is one message of the letter-delivery effort, de la Cruz said. "We have parents who are being separated from their children."

The policies being followed by the federal government toward immigrants won't solve any problem, he said. "It will create more problems in the future. As a Christian, I think we are invited to speak up, to be a voice for those who don't have a voice, and welcome everybody."

The priest said that "all those letters, all those efforts of many people from a church who are trying to speak on behalf of others" are a way for the group to act as the body of Christ.

Across the country, parishes, community groups and dioceses have rallied around immigrants through fundraising, ramping up food pantries, and accompanying people to appointments with federal authorities. Several U.S. bishops have also written letters and public statements in support of immigrants.

Advertisement

At the same time, some communities are taking precautions to protect immigrants. An annual Salvadoran festival normally held in September in Maryland has been canceled. Around Los Angeles, several towns canceled events including July 4 celebrations, outdoor movies and concerts in parks, out of concern that participants might be targeted for immigration enforcement.

Amid an immigration arrest push in May in Tennessee, Bishop J. Mark Spalding of Nashville, Tennessee, advised Catholics that they are not obligated to attend Mass on Sunday if that would put their safety at risk. Diocesan spokesman Rick Musacchio told OSV News that Mass attendance was down by 50% at the two major parishes that are majority Spanish-speaking.

A few weeks later in San Bernardino, California, Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested people at two Catholic parishes, prompting San Bernardino Bishop Alberto Rojas to write a letter to Catholics saying such actions are "creating a tremendous amount of fear, confusion and anxiety for many. It is not of the Gospel of Jesus Christ — which guides us in all that we do."

Rojas asked political leaders and decision-makers "to please reconsider and cease these tactics immediately, in favor of an approach that respects human rights and human dignity and builds toward a more lasting, comprehensive reform of our immigration system."

San Diego Auxiliary Bishop Michael Pham, who is soon to be installed as head of the diocese, has encouraged priests to accompany immigrants to their appointments with immigration authorities. On June 20, he was part of a group of religious leaders who did just that.

In a break during the Maryland group's delivery stops, Dominique Njinkeu, a Cameroonian immigrant, said he was encouraged by seeing so many people similarly bringing messages to members of Congress and it made him think that it might be possible to bring about change.

Njinkeu said he loved seeing all the nurses and doctors that day. He had worn a tunic and knit hat reflecting his heritage. Even though he was hot, he was proud to show who he represented, he said.

"I'm just saying, this is who I am, pay attention," he said.