News

Detroit Archbishop Edward Weisenburger joins other clergy during a procession supporting im

Detroit Archbishop Edward Weisenburger, center, joins other clergy during a procession from Most Holy Trinity Church in Detroit's Corktown neighborhood to the ICE Regional Field Office on Michigan Avenue in downtown Detroit July 14. The procession was organized by Strangers No Longer, a Catholic immigrant rights advocacy group. (OSV News/Detroit Catholic/Valaurian Waller)

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Detroit Archbishop Edward Weisenburger joined other clergy and religious as hundreds of lay faithful visited the city's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Field Office to deliver a letter asking the agency to review immigration enforcement policies and practices it says have created fear in the immigrant community.

"Heavenly Father, You are the source of all life and light," Weisenburger prayed before the July 14 procession. "You call us to reverence your presence in all those we meet, but most especially the poor, the needy, the troubled, and the immigrant. Be with us today as we spiritually accompany those who are suffering and frightened. Make firm our resolve to reveal and uphold their dignity as your beloved sons and

daughters."

Weisenberger, appointed in February by Pope Francis to lead the Detroit Archdiocese, in 2018 suggested the possibility of U.S. bishops imposing "canonical penalties" — including denying Communion — to Catholics who participated in the first Trump administration's policy of separating immigrant families along the U.S.-Mexico border.

In December, as Tucson bishop, he joined other Arizona Christian leaders to express "grave concern" over Trump's mass deportation plans that could include arrests at places of worship.

Weisenburger concluded his comments ahead of the procession: "Heavenly Father, we ask that you move the hearts of all the members of our great nation to return to our roots of genuine respect for the human rights of all, and the inherent dignity of all persons. May we once again lead the world through our example of compassion and welcome."

Strangers No Longer, a Catholic organization that speaks on behalf of immigrants, organized the solemn procession from Most Holy Trinity Parish in Detroit's Corktown neighborhood to the ICE office.

> 'Heavenly Father, we ask that you move the hearts of all the members of our great nation to return to our roots of genuine respect for the human rights of all, and the inherent dignity of all persons.'
> — Detroit Archbishop Edward Weisenburger
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The group's letter, which was read aloud to the people gathered outside the building that houses the ICE field office, highlighted concerns the group has raised over immigration enforcement practices. They include the lack of clear identification of ICE agents during immigration actions, including their use of face masks, a lack of communication between ICE and local law enforcement, and the detainment of individuals who have not committed a felony, the group's leaders said.

The procession down Porter Street and Michigan Avenue ended at ICE's field office, where Fr. David Buersmeyer, Strangers No Longer's chaplain, and Judith Brooks, the

group's board president, asked to deliver the letter, but were turned away.

The group said it will look for other ways to deliver the letter, possibly through local congressional leaders.

"The basic feeling is disappointed, but not unexpected, I guess," Buersmeyer told reporters after the procession. "This is not an anti-government protest. We want ICE to do their job, but to do it in a way that doesn't create fear in the community. And some of the things we address in our letter are creating unnecessary chaos and disruption in people's lives."

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The day began at the plaza in front of Most Holy Trinity Church, where Strangers No Longer organized clergy to speak before the procession.

"Everything we do today — everything we do as Strangers No Longer — is rooted in what we call Catholic social teaching," Buersmeyer said. "In fact, our pope took the name Leo because Leo XIII in 1891 started what we call Catholic social teaching."

Buersmeyer said the belief in human dignity and the common good undergird support for immigrants.

"Every human being has basic human dignity — no matter their ethnicity, their race, their documented status, whatever. Everyone has basic human dignity that's inviolable and inalienable, and we want to make sure it's protected," he said.

The common good, Buersmeyer said, " doesn't look at how the best off are doing. It's looking at those on the margins; do they have at least basic access to the basic goods that are needed to live a dignified life?"

Before the procession, Weisenburger spoke to local media on why the church takes a stance on immigration.

"We are motivated today by our beliefs that flow from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our Judeo-Christian tradition, which is that every human being has dignity and every human life has worth," the archbishop said. "And so our God doesn't ask us to make distinctions among who is worthy and who is not, but rather every human being has dignity, every human being has worth, and we're here especially to make a prophetic witness to how our nation needs to go back to our roots of charity,

accompaniment and welcome," Weisenburger said.

Protesters at immigration event

During the procession, parishioners carried banners representing their parish's Strangers No Longer "Circle of Support," which educate the community about the experiences of immigrants, accompany migrants to medical appointments and legal proceedings, and advocate for a just immigration system.

"We gather today as Michigan residents from different faith traditions and cultures to advocate for a more compassionate and just treatment of all our brothers and sisters," said Immaculate Heart of Mary Sr. Rebecca Vonderhaar.

"We thank you Lord, for all who have opened their hearts to many who are fleeing for their lives," she added. "We ask you for help now to open our arms and welcome and reach out our hands in support that the desperate may find new hope and lives be restored."

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As the procession made its way to the ICE field office, the names of locals who had been deported were read aloud.

"We are here today to ask that our nation and its leaders know that many of our brothers and sisters and their families have proved their innate goodness, yet have been so unjustly treated by raids and mass deportations," Vonderhaar said. "Let us know that apathy is never an option, but trust with faith and goodwill, and our advocacy will bear fruit. Trusting in your goodness, oh God, we move on."

As the procession reached the field office, the assembly began to pray for those affected by recent immigration raids in Detroit and across the nation, and sang a hymn of solidarity with all immigrants and migrants.

"Today's actions are based on basic moral principles that come from Catholic social teaching," Buersmeyer said. "It's not a political, partisan action; it's living the Gospel."