U.S. Border Patrol agents apprehend migrants in Mission, Texas, April 9, 2019, after they illeg

U.S. Border Patrol agents apprehend migrants in Mission, Texas, April 9, 2019, after they illegally crossed the U.S.-Mexico border, in this file photo. (OSV News photo/Loren Elliott, Reuters)



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The Catholic bishops of Kansas Aug. 14 called on the faithful to remember the dignity of every person, "especially those fleeing hardship," and urged public officials "to use existing legal discretion to treat undocumented migrants humanely."

"Unnecessary raids, mass detentions, and family separations betray the values of our nation and the Gospel," they wrote in a joint pastoral letter on immigration. "We urge the faithful to encounter immigrants as neighbors and build welcoming parishes where politics never poisons compassion."

"We speak with one voice to affirm the sacred dignity of every human person, especially those fleeing hardship, who now call our state home," the bishops said. "Amid political division and fear, we remind our communities that at the center of every immigration debate are real people: families in our pews, children in our schools, workers in our neighborhoods, and volunteers in our parishes. Their bishops see, pray, and stand with them."

Addressed to "the people of God in Kansas and to all people of good will," the pastoral was signed by Archbishop W. Shawn McKnight of Kansas City, Bishop Carl A.

Kemme of Wichita and Bishop Gerald L. Vincke of Salina. They released the pastoral on their respective diocesan websites.

The prelates said they "support the role of law enforcement in protecting public safety. Violent crime and unsecured borders must be addressed, no matter a person's legal status."

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"Criminals are taking advantage of our country's broken immigration system to abuse" people who are the most vulnerable and they create "chaos in our communities," the bishops said.

But "working migrants, those volunteering in our parishes, paying taxes, sacrificing for their families and following our laws, deserve not fear and intimidation but protection, solidarity and a welcoming community," the bishops wrote.

"Treating all migrants and refugees as if they were violent criminals is simply unjust," they continued. "They are human beings made in God's image: mothers, fathers, children, and grandparents, motivated not by malice but by a desire for safety, stability, and the chance to provide for their families. Like generations before them, including our ancestors, they strengthen the fabric of our society through hard work, perseverance, and faith."

Archbishop McKnight and Bishops Kemme and Vincke warned against people allowing themselves "to see other people as less than human, as mere problems to be solved." By doing so, they said, "we degrade our own humanity."

"When we consider an unborn child only as a complication to be eliminated, and when we consider new arrivals only as problems to be removed, we become less merciful, less just, less human," they said.

"The Church teaches that when people are driven by poverty or violence to leave home, they retain their full dignity and must be treated accordingly," they said, referencing the Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 2241), which "affirms that

while nations may regulate borders, they must also welcome those seeking security, especially when home countries cannot provide it."

"This balance demands just and merciful policies," the bishops said.

"We are called to serve Christ in the poor, the alien, and the outcast," they said in conclusion. "May we never forget His words: "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40)."