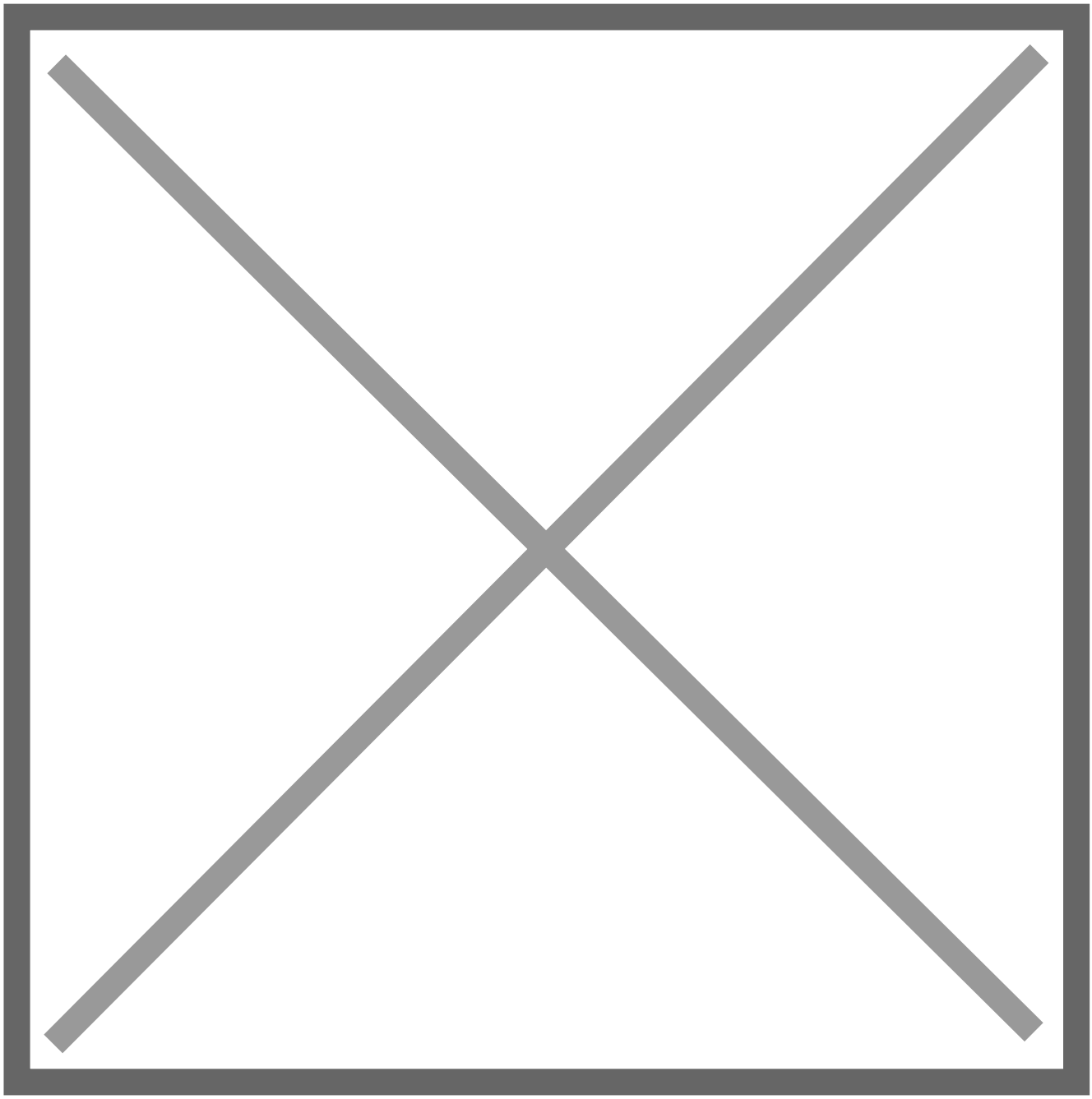
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Pope Leo XIV waves goodbye to participants in the conference "Refugees & Migrants in Our Common Home," organized by the Augustinian-run Villanova University in suburban Philadelphia, at the end of an audience at the Vatican Oct. 2, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

by Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

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Migrants and refugees often are "privileged witnesses of hope through their resilience and trust in God," Pope Leo XIV said.

"Often they maintain their strength while seeking a better future, in spite of the obstacles that they encounter," he said Oct. 2 during a meeting with participants in the conference "Refugees and Migrants in Our Common Home," organized by the Augustinian-run Villanova University in suburban Philadelphia.

The Vatican dicasteries for Promoting Integral Human Development and for Culture and Education and the U.S. bishops' Migration and Refugee Services were among the co-sponsors of the conference, held in Rome Oct. 1-3 just before the Jubilee of Migrants and the Jubilee of Missions Oct. 4-5.

Leo encouraged participants to share migrants' and refugees' stories of steadfast faith and hope so that they could be "an inspiration for others and assist in developing ways to address the challenges that they have faced in their own lives."

The pope also returned to a theme he had mentioned in September when discussing migration — the "globalization of powerlessness."

Overcoming the widespread sense that no one can make a difference "requires patience, a willingness to listen, the ability to identify with the pain of others and the recognition that we have the same dreams and the same hopes," Leo XIV told the group.

Faced with a growing sense of being unable to change or improve the situation, he said, "we risk becoming immobile, silent and sad, thinking that nothing can be done when we are faced with innocent suffering."

Before the conference, Villanova held the official launch of its Mother Cabrini Institute on Immigration, which promotes programs of scholarship, advocacy and service to migrants at the university and with the local community.

Leo praised the project's goal of bringing together "leading voices throughout a variety of disciplines in order to respond to the current urgent challenges brought by the increasing number of people, now estimated to be over 100 million, who are affected by migration and displacement."

Michele Pistone, founder and faculty director of the institute, told conference participants that she was inspired by Francis, who called on universities to do more teaching, research and social promotion with migrants and refugees.

"Now, Pope Leo XIV is again asking us to become missionary disciples working to reconcile a wounded world," Pistone said.

"In order for us to understand the other, we need to meet them and encounter them and have dialogues with them," she told Catholic News Service Oct. 2. "That's what Pope Francis called us to do, and now Pope Leo is calling us to do."

"To see the human face in every immigrant, in every person, is just so important and so central to our Gospel," Pistone said.

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Sr. Norma Pimentel, a Missionary of Jesus and executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in Brownsville, Texas, said, migrants "are missionaries of hope to us, because their presence with us honestly sanctifies who and where we are."

People who fear migrants and refugees or are convinced they are migrating just to take jobs from citizens need to take the time to actually meet a newcomer, Sr. Pimentel said. Then, "they will stop seeing them as somebody that is invading my space, but rather as somebody who I have the opportunity to be able to show the presence of God."

She has the same message for U.S. President Donald Trump or any political leader, she said: "Please come and see them. Please see their faces. Please see these

families that are directly affected by your decisions and your laws and how you feel you must proceed to be as president."

The 2024 U.S. presidential election campaign succeeded in sending the erroneous message that migrants are "invaders that come and take over our land and destroy our America and take our jobs," she said.

"They're not here to destroy or to hurt anybody, but rather to be part of a community that will embrace them, as Pope Francis would say, would integrate them into the community and would protect them so that they can be a good part of who we are in America," she told CNS.

Addressing the conference Oct. 1, she said that "in a world marked by fear, division and uncertainty, we are invited to be people of hope, pilgrims of hope, of that hope which comes from our trust in the Lord. It is a living force, one that shapes how we see others, how we act and how we respond."

"In this Jubilee Year of Hope, we are called to find within ourselves kindness and compassion and courage, especially courage," Pimentel said.

"Today, unfortunately, we are witnessing an unprecedented assault on humanity worldwide," she said, but as her bishop, Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, has said, "We may not have the power to stop the injustices that are destroying our communities. But we do have the power to love. We can be neighbors to those living in fear and who are afraid to go to work or even to go to the supermarket."

"No government can stop us from living out our faith and caring for our refugee brothers and sisters," she said.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.