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Pope Leo XIV arrives in St. Peter's Square for his weekly general audience, at the Vatican, Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2025. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

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Vatican City — October 8, 2025

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The Texas bishop on the front lines of the U.S. immigration crackdown met Wednesday with Pope Leo XIV and brought him a packet of letters from immigrant families "terrorized" by fear that they and their loved ones will be rounded up and deported as the Trump administration's tactics grow increasingly combative.

El Paso Bishop Mark Seitz also showed Leo a video detailing the plight of migrants, and told The Associated Press afterward that Leo vowed to "stand with" them and the Catholic leaders who are trying to help them.

"He had a few words for us, thanking us for our commitment to the immigrant peoples and also saying that he hopes that the bishops' conference will speak to this issue and continue to speak to it," said Seitz, chair of the migration committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Catholic leaders in the U.S. have denounced the Trump administration's crackdown, which has split up families, incited fears and upended life in American churches and schools that serve migrant communities. The administration has defended the crackdown as safeguarding public safety and national security.

"We don’t want to get into the political fray, we’re not politicians, but we need to teach the faith," and especially the Gospel message recognizing the inherent dignity of all God's children, and to care for the poor and welcome the stranger, Seitz said.

The letters and video he brought to Leo detail the fear that even legal migrants are facing every day. U.S. citizens, immigrants with legal status and children have been among those detained in increasingly brazen and aggressive encounters by federal agents. In Leo's hometown of Chicago, agents have stormed apartment complexes by helicopter as families slept, deployed chemical agents near a public school and arrested a city councilman in the hospital.

"They can’t go out. They are afraid to shop, to go to church and so they stay home," wrote Maria in one of the letters delivered to Leo. Originally from Guatemala, she has lived in San Francisco for a quarter-century and qualified for asylum years ago, but has relatives in the U.S. who are not legal.

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"The pope needs to talk to Trump and ask Trump to think about what he’s doing to immigrants," she wrote. "The pope needs to plead with Trump and Trump needs to listen to him. Trump has to change what he’s doing."

Just before he died, Pope Francis strongly rebuked the Trump administration’s plans for mass deportations, warning that the forceful removal of people purely because of their illegal status deprives them of their inherent dignity.

History's first U.S. pope has followed in Francis' line. Last weekend, Leo celebrated a special Holy Year Mass for migrants, denouncing the "coldness of indifference" and the "stigma of discrimination" that migrants desperate to flee violence and suffering often face. Asked by reporters this week about the crackdown in Chicago, Leo declined to comment.

On Wednesday, Leo was running late for the audience with Seitz and the delegation of around a dozen people, including members of the Hope Border Institute, an advocacy group formed in partnership with the El Paso diocese. The delegation members assured Leo that they would stand with him as they chatted in a Vatican reception room.

"Later on in the meeting he said, 'I will stand with you,' so it was a beautiful little exchange," said Seitz.

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