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Migrants seeking asylum in the U.S. walk into a temporary humanitarian respite center run by

Migrants seeking asylum in the U.S. walk into a temporary humanitarian respite center run by Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in McAllen, Texas, April 8, 2021. Missouri's Catholic bishops in a statement called on U.S. lawmakers and policymakers to work toward merciful and just immigration policies for this country. (OSV News/Reuters/Go Nakamura)

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Missouri's Catholic bishops are urging lawmakers and policymakers at every level of government to work toward lasting solutions to the challenges and opportunities brought by immigrants and immigration to this country.

"We urge our elected officials at every level to reflect this truth in policy by pursuing comprehensive immigration reform that secures our borders while offering a just and merciful pathway for those who are already part of our communities," the bishops proclaimed in a statement released Oct. 5.

"It is time to move beyond temporary fixes to a solution that honors the dignity of all and provides security and protects the sovereignty of our nation," the bishops

stated. "Both are necessary for a prosperous future."

Signing the statement were Archbishop Mitchel Rozanski of St. Louis, Bishop James Johnston Jr. of Kansas City-St. Joseph and Bishop Edward Rice of Springfield-Cape Girardeau in their role as board members of the Missouri Catholic Conference. The MCC is the public-policy agency of the state's four Catholic dioceses.

The Jefferson City Diocese will not have a bishop until Bishop-designate Ralph B. O'Donnell is ordained and installed on Oct. 28.

The Missouri bishops' statement coincided with the annual World Day of Migrants and Refugees, observed this year Oct. 4-5, and the churchwide observance of the Jubilee of Migrants.

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In the statement, they acknowledge the growing anxiety and uncertainty in this nation surrounding the issue of immigration.

They highlighted a central truth of the Christian faith: "Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God and thus possesses an inherent dignity that is inviolable."

The bishops pointed out that many individuals and families have come to America fleeing violence, poverty and extraordinary hardship.

"These are not mere statistics, but brothers and sisters in the human family, members who belong to and contribute to our local communities, parishes and our nation," the bishops stated.

A combination photo shows Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski, Bishop James Johnston Jr. and Bisho

A combination photo shows Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski of St. Louis, Bishop James Johnston Jr. of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo., and Bishop Edward Rice of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Mo. (OSV News/Jerry Naunheim Jr., Archdiocese of St. Louis, Terry Scroggins, Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Dean Curtis, Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau)

They reiterated their support as shepherds of the Catholic Church in Missouri, for secure borders that ensure the safety and welfare of the nation.

"We also stand in solidarity with immigrants and their families, especially those who have already suffered so much in search of stability, peace, and safety," the bishops stated.

They pointed to church teaching, articulated in Section 2241 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that a society oriented to the common good must address the issue of immigration in a manner that is both just and merciful.

"Civil authorities are duty-bound to protect citizens and ensure the rule of law, especially against evildoers," the bishops stated. "Yet, it is equally just, and profoundly Christian, to distinguish between violent criminals and those who are fleeing persecution or crushing poverty to seek a better life."

They echoed a statement from St. John Paul II's message for World Migration Day 1996: "His irregular legal status cannot allow the migrant to lose his dignity, since he is endowed with inalienable rights, which can neither be violated nor ignored."

The bishops acknowledged the complexity of creating policies that are at once just, charitable and merciful.

Nonetheless, "we cannot remain indifferent," they stated. "Our Lord reminds us, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:40)."

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The bishops called on all Catholics and people of faith and goodwill to pray fervently for the nation's leaders: "that they may govern with wisdom and compassion, and for those who flee persecution and hardship in search of safety."

They also challenged all Catholics to learn and understand church teachings about migration and the dignity of the human person.

"And let us extend the hand of charity to migrants and refugees in our neighborhoods, schools and parishes," they said.

The bishops closed by calling upon the intercession of the Blessed Mother under her title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas.