Opinion
Guest Voices



(Unsplash/Ernie A. Stephens)



by Jim Hickey

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 16, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

When voices meant to guide us fall silent in the face of cruelty, the Gospel itself seems to whisper rather than proclaim.

Like many Americans, I have been heartbroken seeing so many migrant family separations taking place across our country, on Long Island, and even within my own community of Westbury.

What’s been even more heartbreaking is the apparent indifference on the part of so many of Long Island’s Catholic clergy, who, in my view, should be speaking out boldly against this injustice.

The Gospels make it clear that following Jesus means committing to justice and standing up to oppression. His ministry was rooted in compassion, righteous anger in the face of injustice and a deep concern for the dignity and protection of the most vulnerable. But too many of our religious leaders are overlooking the very essence of Catholicism: the principle of human dignity, which demands an unconditional welcome of the vulnerable stranger.



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and federal officers detain a migrant as he walks out from a hearing during targeted detainment at a U.S. immigration court in the Manhattan borough of New York City Oct. 27, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/David 'Dee' Delgado)

I have been a lifelong Roman Catholic, receiving the sacraments of baptism as an infant, first Communion in childhood and confirmation at age 12. My faith was nurtured in Catholic schools from grades 1 through 12. I raised my children in the faith, passing on the values instilled in me. It is from this foundation that I am heartbroken by how church leaders seem to be ignoring our immigrant neighbors: The Gospel reminds us, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35), a call to treat everyone with dignity and compassion.

I shouldn’t be surprised. Ever since the 2024 campaign and election, the silence of Catholic leaders on social issues has been deafening. When a candidate dismissed places such as Haiti and other nations using a vulgar expletive and falsely claimed that immigrants eat cats and dogs, few local Catholic voices publicly defended the dignity that the Gospel demands for all. Now, as families are being torn apart and our hard-working immigrant community is being treated as unwelcome invaders, the story is the same: silence from the clergy.

I have been outspoken about my feelings on this issue. In essays and letters to editors in Long Island newspapers, I have often urged our Catholic leaders to speak out on social justice issues in the light of the Gospel, but I often wonder if any of them actually read what I have to say.



St. Agnes Cathedral in Rockville Centre, N.Y., is seen Jan. 1, 2024. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Recently, with encouragement from a Jesuit priest, I decided to go one step further. I emailed, snail-mailed, or hand-delivered a cover letter and one of my recently published letters to all 133 pastors in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, to our bishop and to the sisters of St. Joseph and St. Dominic. My letter condemns the U.S. policy of family separation as a moral atrocity, urging Catholic clergy to join the nuns and priests already standing with immigrant families by speaking out against this injustice. It stresses that silence in the face of such cruelty amounts to complicity. I asked the clergy to take a moment to prayerfully reflect on the letter and to please respond.

My outreach took a measure of effort. Because the diocese removed its clergy email directory following the child abuse scandal, gathering contact information meant searching parish bulletins and websites, making it a more time-consuming task than I had anticipated. I completed all mailings this summer, and to date the responses, or lack thereof, have been very disappointing.

Advertisement

While both orders of sisters replied promptly with compassion, fewer than 20% of pastors responded, and of those, all responses were from pastors of poor parishes already assisting the immigrant families. None of the pastors from wealthier parishes responded, nor did the bishop of Rockville Centre.

I recognize that our clergy carry heavy burdens: spiritual, pastoral and administrative. But I wonder why there is such disinterest in an issue often mentioned in Scripture. Are clergy capitulating out of fear of the current administration in the same manner law firms, media outlets, universities, etc. have? If so, how does that square with the Gospel they proclaim?

I am not asking for responses in the spirit of the Berrigan brothers, the Catholic peace activists from the 1960s. I am asking for something simpler: moral courage to speak, to act and to lead. Voices supporting justice can offer hope to families in fear, and guide a church seeking to live its mission.

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