

News



Archbishop Bernard Hebda, pictured in a 2019 file photo, is calling in a Jan. 20, 2026, Wall Street Journal opinion piece for "comprehensive immigration reform now," citing "human cost on all sides" after his territory has become a flashpoint in the nation's immigration policy debate. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

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Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis — whose territory has become a flashpoint in the nation's immigration policy debate — is calling for "comprehensive immigration reform now," citing "human cost on all sides."

The archbishop published a Jan. 20 opinion piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, reflecting on recent violent clashes in his state over immigration — and warning that what once was "a difficult policy discussion" has now "hardened into a cultural and political battleground" that is "playing out on the streets here."

"If recent events in Minnesota have clarified anything, it's that we can no longer put off the hard work of immigration reform," wrote Hebda. "Each year of inaction has made the debate louder, angrier and less humane."

He lamented failed bipartisan attempts in 2013 to rectify the nation's immigration challenges, noting that a "strong" bill set to allocate "billions for border security and a 12-year path to citizenship for law-abiding immigrants" had languished, since "the House never took it up."

That bill had "offered a glimpse of what responsible governance can look like," he said, listing "bipartisan engagement, attention to enforcement and legal pathways and a recognition that widespread irregularity benefits no one."

But, said Hebda, the initiative "sadly failed, not because the problem was unsolvable, but because political will collapsed under pressure from the extremes."

"We have paid the price for that failure ever since," he added.

Hebda said that "the longer Washington waits" to effect immigration reform, "the worse the problem gets."

"Communities are strained and millions live in a constant state of uncertainty," he said. "This serves neither justice nor the common good."

Hebda said that "if we continue to delay, the debate will only grow more bitter and the solutions more elusive. The moment to act is now."

He repeated the "the consistent call of Catholic bishops around the U.S. for true statesmen to step forward, set aside partisan calculations and enact meaningful federal immigration reform."

That reform does not discount "recent failures" with the nation's immigration policies, he said.

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"The nation was poorly served by those who threw the border open. The flood of migrants overwhelmed local communities, eroded public trust and weakened the rule of law," wrote Hebda. "Compassion divorced from order isn't compassion at all; it's negligence."

At the same time, he stressed, "it's wrong to blame undocumented immigrants themselves, many of whom came here seeking safety, work or family reunification.

"Solidarity can't be selective," he said. "We must stand with citizens and undocumented immigrants together as human beings created in God's image."

Hebda listed the key principles of Catholic social teaching — which draws on papal, conciliar and Church documents to articulate the means of building a just society and living out holiness in modern life — on the issue of immigration, which "insists on holding together truths that politicians prefer to separate."

According to that teaching, he said, "Nations have the right and duty to secure their borders and enforce their laws. Immigrants are human beings with natural rights that must be respected. Authentic justice requires both the rule of law and mercy, both accountability and hospitality."

In such light, said the archbishop, the efforts of immigration enforcement officers should be respected "when they are fulfilling their mission to identify and detain serious criminals who have illegally entered the country," since doing so serves the common good and fulfills a "moral obligation" of "protecting the innocent."

Yet, he warned, "the current environment is untenable," as "even law-abiding immigrants are living in fear that any interaction with authorities could separate parents from children or unravel years of honest work."

Hebda called for "a comprehensive, long-term solution that reflects reality rather than ideology," with the "granting of a lawful status" for those who have built law-abiding, productive lives in their communities, and with the recognition that "some people will be deported."

"Mercy doesn't negate consequences, and compassion doesn't mean wide-open borders," wrote Hebda.

Ultimately, he said, immigration reform is a question of "restoring moral order, strengthening families and promoting the common good," with that work demanding "courage, humility, and a willingness to compromise — virtues that define proper statesmanship."

Hebda underscored that his message was prompted by first-hand pastoral experience with all affected by immigration challenges.

"As a pastor, I see the human cost on all sides. I minister to immigrant parishioners who are fearful of driving their children to school or shopping for groceries, regardless of their legal status," he wrote. "I also serve those who feel abandoned by leaders who have seemed more interested in political posturing than in protecting their communities."

He added, "The church can't choose one flock over another. Neither should the nation."

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. [View the full series.](#)