Opinion
Guest Voices
Students at Juan Diego Catholic High School in Draper, Utah, conduct a walkout in support of

Students at Juan Diego Catholic High School in Draper, Utah, conduct a walkout in support of the immigrant community and to protest against U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security just after noon on Feb. 3. (OSV News/Linda Petersen, Intermountain Catholic)

Kristy Nabhan-Warren

View Author Profile

THE CONVERSATION

The Conversation

View Author Profile

## Join the Conversation

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

March 1, 2026
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

In Portland, Oregon, people wearing inflatable frog costumes — The Portland Frog Brigade — danced outside immigration offices. In Chicago, parents and neighbors walked children to and from school, forming "magic schoolbuses" for families who feared detention.

Thousands of Americans have taken to the streets since fall 2025 to protest against U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's tactics. These public demonstrations include the more familiar-looking protest signs and chanting, as well as other everyday ways of showing solidarity with minority groups being targeted.

The Americans taking part come from many different faith traditions, and none. But this type of solidarity reminds me of "accompaniment," a concept I study as a scholar of American Catholicism and Roman Catholicism more broadly.

The idea of accompaniment is rooted in modern Catholic social thought. It was first coined by the late Pope Francis in his 2013 apostolic exhortation Evangelii Gaudium ("Joy of the Gospel").

**Accompaniment and its history**

Apostolic exhortations are letters written by popes that urge Catholics and non-Catholics alike to demonstrate their faith in everyday actions such as caring for neighbors, the poor and the dispossessed. They also respond to specific issues and challenges of the particular time, such as famine, war and poverty.

Francis penned his call to action soon after he became the pope in the midst of escalating global humanitarian and refugee crises — notably, the death of thousands of migrants crossing the Mediterranean to the island of Lampedusa, near Sicily, in June 2013.

Francis demanded that Catholics and the broader global community pay attention to the dignity and humanity of migrants and called for a reawakening of people's consciences "so that what happened would not be repeated." Francis called the apathy to the death of migrants "globalization of indifference" to suffering.

Pope Francis talks with immigrants at the port in Lampedusa, Italy, July 8, 2013. Two months

Pope Francis talks with immigrants at the port in Lampedusa, Italy, July 8, 2013. Two months after his election, the late pope visited the tiny Italian island in the Mediterranean Sea to draw attention to those who had lost their lives attempting the crossing from the African coast. (CNS/pool via Reuters)

He urged Catholics around the world to show love and mercy for the most vulnerable people in demonstrable ways. Calling it the "art of accompaniment," he used the imagery of walking alongside the poor and taking off sandals in a sign of solidarity.

As the first pope from Latin America, Francis' teachings on accompaniment were rooted in the Catholic liberation theology that spread throughout the region in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Liberation theology embraces putting the needs of the most vulnerable first and is grounded in biblical teachings. It prioritizes a "preferential option for the poor."

Francis stands within a long tradition of Catholic social teaching that can be traced back to Pope Leo XIII. Leo was the first modern pope to coin the term "social doctrine," an official Catholic teaching on how to build and maintain just and equitable economies.

Leo issued the papal document *Rerum Novarum* ("On Capital and Labor") in May 1891 in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. *Rerum Novarum* emphasized the dignity of work and called for fair wages and humane working conditions.

**The Catholic Church today and immigration**

In more recent times, Pope Leo XIV — like his predecessor Francis and the earlier pope whose name he chose — has embraced a preferential option for the poor and an ethic of accompaniment. On Oct. 9, 2025, he issued his first exhortation, *Dilexi Te* — "I Have Loved You" — continuing Francis' and the modern church's focus on caring for vulnerable people.

In a section dedicated to migrants, Leo wrote that humans will be judged by how well they treat people who are poor, sick, imprisoned and foreign. Demonstrating love and concern for the poor, Leo emphasized, was a "hallmark" of faith.

Advertisement

Leo also endorsed a Nov. 12 pastoral message from the U.S. Catholic Council of Bishops urging immigration reforms that "recognize the fundamental dignity of all persons," while maintaining national security interests, as both were possible. He urged Catholics and other "people of goodwill" to "listen carefully" to this message.

**Accompaniment and people of goodwill**

Accompaniment is uniquely Catholic, but the social thought it describes goes far beyond any religious denomination. From Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., everyday Catholics and non-Catholics alike have been demonstrating solidarity with the immigrants.

They are rejecting ICE's aggressive tactics while demonstrating that they value human dignity and human rights.

Accompaniment appears to be a common language of solidarity — a way for "people of goodwill," as Leo put it — to stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable people and refuse to accept immigration policies they see as being dehumanizing.

This article is republished from The Conversation under a Creative Commons license. Read the original article.

Kristy Nabhan-Warren is Elizabeth Kahl Figge Chair in Catholic Studies at the University of Iowa. She is affiliated with the Catholic Worker organization.

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