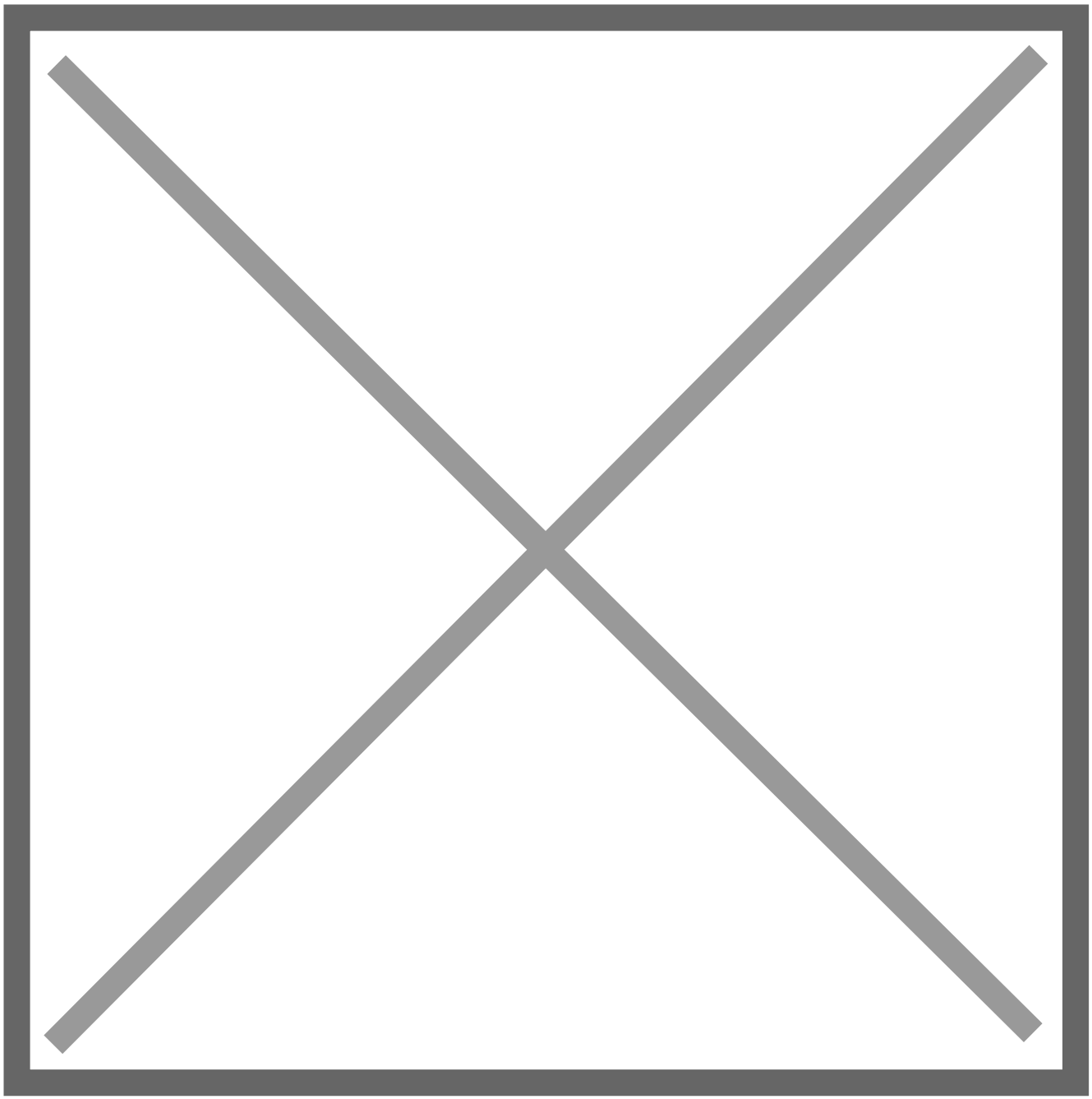
News



Phoenix Auxiliary Bishop Peter Dai Bui speaks during the "Witness to Hope: Responding to Mass Deportations" gathering in Phoenix March 12, 2026. The regional gathering focused on key issues related to mass deportations of immigrants and how to mobilize the Church in response. (OSV News/Diocese of Phoenix/Brett Meister)

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As the Trump administration continues its immigration crackdown, advocates from across the nation gathered in Arizona to discuss pastoral strategies for understanding and applying Church teaching to mass deportations.

On March 12, the Diocese of Phoenix held an all-day conference titled "Witness to Hope: Responding to Mass Deportations," drawing together experts on immigration law, Catholic social teaching about immigration and ministry to migrants.

Addressing participants, Bishop John Dolan of Phoenix pointed to Pope Leo XIV's apostolic exhortation Dilexi Te, in which the pope stresses that "love for the Lord … is one with love for the poor."

"Where do you find Christ?" asked Dolan. "If Jesus says, 'I will be with you until the end of time,' where do you find him? Among the least of us — and isn't that kind of why we are here?"

The Phoenix event was the second such regional diocesan gathering, with Bishop Bruce Lewandowski of Providence, Rhode Island, convening the first in December. A third is slated to take place May 6 in Detroit.

The "Witness to Hope" events are coordinated by the Center for Migration Studies of New York and the Hope Border Institute, which serves the immigrant community in El Paso, Texas, and the surrounding area.

Sponsoring bishops and participating organizations collaborate in hosting the conferences, which are part of Catholic IMMpact (Catholic Immigrant Prophetic Action Project), an initiative the center and the institute jointly launched in January.

Other Catholic organizations supporting the "Witness to Hope" gatherings are the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, the Catholic Health Association of the United States, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network and Jesuit Refugee Service-USA.

The Phoenix agenda reviewed Catholic social teaching on immigration and enforcement, which balances three interrelated principles: the right of persons to migrate in order to sustain their lives and those of their families, the right of a country to regulate its borders and control immigration, and a nation's duty to regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

In addition, conference sessions addressed the use of detention in mass deportations, knowing one's rights in an enforcement scenario, and best rules and practices for sensitive locations, such as churches and schools, that have come under immigration enforcement scrutiny.

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Panelists also discussed mental health ministry to migrants, as well as developing both diocesan and pastoral plans for responding to the administration's mass deportation efforts.

Among the presenters were Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy and communications at the Center for Migration Studies of New York; Katherine Clifton, assistant director of communications for the USCCB Secretariat of Migration; Sofia Lozano Pallares, assistant director for community engagement at Hope Border Institute; and Jesuit Fr. Hung Nguyen of the Diocese of San Diego.

"The Church comes with a claim, a spiritual and a universal claim, a non-negotiable claim … that is, every person who crosses a border carries the image and likeness of

God, and no law, no policy, no executive order can strip away that dignity away," said Auxiliary Bishop Peter Dai Bui of Phoenix in his homily at a Mass for conference participants.

As a 5-year-old child, Bui had fled with his family from religious and political oppression in Vietnam, crowding onto his father's fishing boat and eventually settling in New Orleans to build a new life.

Parishes are "where the rubber meets the road" in ministering to migrants, Sue Weishar, a community engagement specialist for Catholic IMMpact, told OSV News.

"It's where we have this opportunity to live our faith and proclaim Gospel values," Weishar told OSV News by phone following the Phoenix gathering.

A parish offering English language classes and basic hospitality — as simple as "coffee, donuts and bananas" — can forge bonds that deepen the awareness of each other's humanity, she said.

Weishar also cited efforts in her home parish in the Archdiocese of New Orleans to bring food to those too frightened to leave their homes during federal immigration enforcement operations over the Christmas holidays.

"We ended up with 42 volunteers," she said. "They went out and bought the groceries with their own money and delivered them to families. And there were just so many beautiful encounter opportunities."

She added, "We're all the body of Christ, and members of that body of Christ are suffering now. … What can we do for our immigrant brothers and sisters in these frightening times?"

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