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Catholic support for immigration reform called a 'moral imperative'

by Catholic News Service

Trenton, N.J. — Catholics need to put aside "any partisan differences" they have on the immigration issue and come together to pray for the welfare of their brother and sister immigrants and for Congress to pass much-hoped-for comprehensive immigration reform, said Bishop David O'Connell of Trenton.

Immigration reform in the United States is "a moral imperative" that goes beyond politics, the bishop said in a pastoral statement he issued for the Trenton diocese's Justice for Immigrants Sunday, observed Sunday.

"Whatever we, as Catholics, can do to foster the hopes and dreams of those who see our country as their potential home is an imperative of the Gospel and of the Catholic social teaching based upon it, not of our political persuasion," O'Connell said.

"Prayer is a powerful prerogative and something that all of us can do. I believe that with all my heart and soul," he added.

The bishop designated Justice for Immigrants Sunday as a day in which Catholics at all parishes in the diocese prayed for concrete action "on fair immigration policies."

Special prayer petitions were read, homilies delivered and materials distributed to inform the Catholic community of the U.S. bishops' support for comprehensive reform as outlined in their 2003 pastoral letter titled "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope."

The principles enunciated in that letter -- among them a path to citizenship for the undocumented, provisions to keep families together and various types of worker visas -- were echoed in a recent pastoral

statement on immigration from the Catholic bishops of New Jersey, advocating the reform of "a badly broken system in our country."

"That something significant and substantial needs to be done is hardly arguable," O'Connell said in his statement. "How best to accomplish that goal continues to be a source of debate, even division within our nation.

"Sadly, people are quick to paint the issues involved with political and partisan brushes, thereby adding to the polarization and the delay in resolution."

Comprehensive immigration reform "is not Washington's problem," he continued. "It is a concern for all citizens of our country as well as those who hope to be, much as it was for our ancestors who arrived here with hopes for and dreams of a better life, 'Under God, with liberty and justice for all.' "

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