

GO AND DO LIKEWISE: A TRADITION OF CARING FOR OUR IMMIGRANT BROTHERS AND SISTERS

*But because he wished to justify himself, he said to Jesus,
“And who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29)*

*“The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’
There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:31)*

On Nov. 12, 2025, the seventh edition of the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* (ERDs) was officially released by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in Baltimore. For those of us working in the Catholic health care ministry, this was big news with significant implications for our work. Many of my colleagues at CHA and our Center for Theology and Ethics in Catholic Health, along with others from throughout the ministry, had worked tirelessly to inform, provide feedback and offer suggestions on the revised document’s content.



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In addition to the release of the updated ERDs, the other big news from the USCCB at the Fall Plenary Assembly involved a pastoral message issued by the bishops on an important topic: immigration policy and its impact on our patients, staff and the communities we serve.

This special message expressed concern about the evolving situation affecting immigrants, those perceived to be immigrants, and many U.S. citizens who share these concerns. This was the first time in 12 years that the USCCB had issued a statement of this kind as a united body. The last time they spoke so urgently on a matter was during the debate over the Affordable Care Act. As a demonstration of the unity displayed by the bishops, the vote to approve the special message was 216 in favor, 5 against and 3 abstentions.¹ The rarity of the vote and the increasing urgency of immigration issues nationwide drew extensive media coverage of the bishops’ statement.

The bishops state, “As pastors, we the bishops of the United States are bound to our people by ties of communion and compassion in Our Lord Jesus

Christ. We are disturbed when we see among our people a climate of fear and anxiety around questions of profiling and immigration enforcement. We are saddened by the state of contemporary debate and the vilification of immigrants.”² They go on to say that “Catholic teaching exhorts nations to recognize the fundamental dignity of all persons, including immigrants.”

The bishops’ statement reminds us not only of the key principles of Catholic social teaching but also of the lessons from scripture that we were all created in the image and likeness of God to care for our brothers and sisters, especially those who are most vulnerable. They point to the parable of the Good Samaritan, the foundational story of Catholic health care, as an example of what it means to care for our neighbors. In their words, “The Church’s concern for neighbor and our concern here for immigrants is a response to the Lord’s command to love as He has loved us.”

RECOGNIZING CHRIST IN EVERY PERSON

In his address to the members of the diplomatic corps earlier this year, Pope Leo XIV reiterated, “In its international relations and actions, the Holy See consistently takes a stand in defense of the inalienable dignity of every person. It cannot

be overlooked, for example, that every migrant is a person and, as such, has inalienable rights that must be respected in every situation. Not all migrants move by choice, but many are forced to flee because of violence, persecution, conflict and even the effects of climate change, as in various parts of Africa and Asia.”³

The pope’s statement was further endorsed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican Secretary of State, indicating his agreement with the American bishops. He called the current situation “unacceptable” and suggested that “the difficulties, problems and contradictions must be resolved in

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other ways.”⁴ Similarly, Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle stated in his recent pastoral letter that “authentic respect for life also extends to refugees and migrants.”⁵

It is in this environment that we now find ourselves as Catholic health care leaders. Over the past many weeks, I have had the opportunity to speak with several mission leaders and others across the ministry as they navigate the situation. Many of our conversations revolved around the interactions or potential interactions with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the health ministry. Common questions that arose include: What do we do if ICE agents come into our facility unannounced? Can ICE agents go into restricted areas? What information are we required to provide to agents? If the agent brings a “detainee” to the facility for care, how do we manage those interactions? Is the ICE agent able to listen to or be involved in care conversations and/or decisions? What rights do the patient detainees and our caregivers have in these situations?

These are all complicated questions that require careful consideration, not only as they relate to our Catholic identity but also in terms of the legal implications involved. In support of our members, CHA has provided resources on our

website to help guide ministry leaders when these circumstances arise.⁶

CHA’s advocacy page asserts that, “As Catholic health providers following the social justice traditions of the Church, CHA remains committed to ensuring that all immigrants, regardless of status, have access to health care and are treated equitably and fairly. Catholic health care organizations serve immigrants, including refugees and victims of human trafficking, in their clinics, emergency rooms and in their facilities. Catholic health care also employs many people who have fled their homeland, seeking a better life for themselves and their communities.”⁷ We have a centuries-long history of caring for all our neighbors in our communities, especially those who are experiencing poverty and are vulnerable.

This commitment certainly includes our immigrant and migrant brothers and sisters. In fact, most of our foundresses were immigrants themselves, courageously journeying to the United States to care for those most in need. The movie *Cabrini* is a powerful dramatization of that experience, tradition and calling that continues to this day.

In a letter sent to the U.S. Senate signed by 300 Catholic leaders, including 15 bishops and many of our sponsoring religious congregations,⁸ we are reminded, “Our faith calls us to recognize Christ in every person; this includes the migrant, the refugee and the child who bears the pain of separation.” They continued, “To disregard that suffering is to turn away from a core moral responsibility we share as a society.” This is who we are and always have been.

CALLED TO MERCY AND ACTION

CHA is partnering with the Church and other organizations to cosponsor regional diocesan convenings on the Catholic community’s response to mass deportations of immigrants and to invite members to share how hospitals are continuing to provide care to vulnerable immigrants while navigating interactions with ICE. The sessions are organized by the Center for Migration Studies of New York and the Hope Border Institute and sponsored by the local bishop of the hosting diocese. The USCCB and Catholic Charities USA are also cosponsors.

At the daylong educational sessions, local Catholic leaders (diocesan staff, Catholic agency staff, priests, religious and parish leaders) will learn about topics, including the Church's teaching and position on immigration, the end of the sensitive locations policy, and how to accompany immigrants. This collaboration is a powerful example of what CHA's strategic objective, United for Change, looks like on the ground.

Cardinal Joseph Tobin, Archbishop of Newark, and Laurie Carafone, executive director of NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, recently spoke at a virtual gathering hosted by Faith in Action, a global organization focused on faith-based community organizing.⁹ The interfaith call — which included over 15 speakers representing several Christian denominations, as well as Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist communities — drew more than 8,000 people, including countless Catholic health care leaders, staff and caregivers.

In her remarks, Carafone focused on Catholic social teaching, which “leads us back to the heart of the Gospel: protecting human life and upholding the inherent dignity of every person.” Cardinal Tobin referenced the parable of the Good Samaritan, where the one “who acted as a neighbor to the one who is suffering” is “the one who showed him mercy and compassion.” The question for all of us, then, is how we will now go and do likewise.

AN ENDURING MESSAGE OF PEACE

On the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis of Assisi in 1226, Pope Leo has proclaimed 2026 the Franciscan Jubilee Year.¹⁰ He emphasized that “in this era, marked by so many seemingly endless wars, by internal and social divisions that create distrust and fear, [St. Francis] continues to speak. Not because he offers technical solutions, but because his life points to the authentic source of peace.”

In this regard, Pope Leo highlighted that St. Francis reminds us that “peace with God, peace among people and peace with creation are inseparable dimensions of a single call to universal reconciliation.”¹¹ And so, as we face the challenges before us, let us all continually reflect on the familiar Prayer of St. Francis, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.”

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NOTES

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