

California Bishops Urge Church and Society to Support Immigrant Families

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SACRAMENTO, CA – During this week of Mother’s Day celebrations in the United States and Mexico, the enduring bonds of family will light up social media, overload telephone lines, and overflow many dining tables as children text, call, FaceTime, present home-made cards, feast, offer bouquets, and thank their mothers for their lifetime of labor and love. The wisdom of the fourth commandment, to honor thy father and mother, is on display as children use all means of transportation and communication to be close to the ones who gave them life. Humanity begins in the environment of the family. Each man and woman sees oneself as part of a family. It is the primordial, essential human network. The family is the basic unit of society. Every family is also called to be a domestic church where children learn to lift their eyes to a merciful God and extend to their hands to all those who are the children of God, no matter their race, color, or creed. For this reason, these festive, holy days dedicated to mothers and their families is an opportune moment to urge public servants to promote laws and procedures that honor and strengthen family bonds. The common good of society relies on the well-being of families. The social fabric unravels when families breakdown and break apart. These self-evident truths underlie the prudent principle of family unification stressed whenever possible in many aspects of social policy. Family unification has been a bedrock precept of immigration law. Immigrants should be treated not just as hands for labor but also as members of families. The history of immigration is a stirring narrative of men and women seeking a better life, not just for themselves, but for their children and families as well. This proud familial legacy, deeply entwined with the growth and expansion of America, is betrayed by immigrant enforcement efforts that would leave children without their mothers or fathers, force parents to withdraw their children from school and church for fear of detection, and disrupt the healthy social rhythms of a neighborhood with unwarranted intrusions. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials have stressed that they are only searching for those who have criminal records or orders of deportation. At the same time, officers have the discretion to detain anyone found without a legal resident status. These same officials have also acknowledged a concern for the welfare of children affected by agency apprehensions. Still, substantiated reports of ICE detentions as well as many unfounded rumors have fueled a pervasive hysteria among immigrant communities undermining more effective, community-based efforts to protect our communities and prevent crimes. Immigrant families are often the most vulnerable victims of criminal activity. They should not be reluctant to ask for protection against those who would threaten them. Law enforcement should support them, honor the sanctuary of the home, and make the integrity of families a priority. We will continue to work with mothers and fathers so that they have the practical knowledge as well as the resources they need to protect and secure their children. Families should know their rights to guard against unlawful, warrant-less, search of their homes. Parents are encouraged to develop plans in the event the families are separated. Much of this is an unjust and unnecessary strain on immigrant families and their communities. A fractured, failing immigration system is shattering families, disrupting industries and farms, and breeding a restless fear in neighborhoods, churches, and schools. This gives no regard to the fourth commandment and betrays the best wisdom of our historically immigrant nation. We renew our call for comprehensive immigration reform that would safeguard the prudent principle of family unification as well as engender a more unified nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

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