



The Most Reverend **Francis Y. Kalabat**, Bishop of St. Thomas the Apostle Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of the U.S.A., shares an update on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) activities on immigration issues that have developed in recent months. The following memorandum is from Reverend Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield, General Secretary of the USCCB, which was sent to all U.S. Bishops.

June-July 2019 USCCB Activities on Immigration Issues

- On June 4, 2019, Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Migration, [applauded](#) the House of Representatives for passing the American Dream and Promise Act of 2019 (H.R. 6), legislation that would provide a pathway to citizenship for qualifying Dreamers and TPS and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders. “This is a big step for Dreamers and TPS holders who have called the United States home but have been working and living in uncertainty for years.” said Bishop Vásquez. “Dreamers, TPS and DED holders are working to make our communities and parishes strong and are vital contributors to our country. We welcome today’s vote and urge the Senate to take up this legislation which gives permanent protection to Dreamers, TPS and DED holders.”
- On June 5, 2019, USCCB/MRS submitted a collection of English language pastoral and educational resources that were developed at the request of the Vatican for the 2019 World Day for Migrants and Refugees (WDMR), which is to be celebrated on September 29th. These resources were developed in coordination with the Catholic Conference of the Philippines. The theme for this year’s celebration is “It is not just about migrants,” which the Holy Father chose as a way “to show up our blind-spots and make sure no one remains excluded from society, whether a long-time resident or someone newly-arrived.” Between June and September 29th MRS is developing and implementing a communications strategy intended to raise the profile of WDMR, with a particular eye to the Catholic

Church in the United States. Included efforts in this campaign will be a press release, a series of social media and email blasts targeted at key constituencies, and a webinar that we will host in mid-August. This webinar will include a representative from the Migrants and Refugees section at the Vatican, who will be able to speak more intentionally on the purpose and objectives of this celebration. A link to all of the resources developed for WDMR will be provided to you once the Vatican posts them on the Migrants and Refugee Section website.

- On June 14, 2019, Bishop Vásquez issued a [statement](#) in support of the Catholic Bishops of Mexico who have expressed concern regarding a recent agreement between Mexico and the United States which will restrict the flow of migrants at the U.S./Mexico Border. Bishop Vásquez stated: “We stand in solidarity with our brother bishops in Mexico. We implore the Administration not to confuse economic issues with the humanitarian issues of forced migration. Families fleeing violence, persecution and extreme poverty must be treated with love and compassion and not be used as a tool for negotiations.”
- On June 18, 2019, Bishop Vásquez sent a letter to the Senate opposing the “Secure and Protect Act of 2019,” S.1494, explaining that it would greatly reduce protections for asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, and human trafficking victims. Read the full [letter](#).
- On June 18, 2019, Bishop Vásquez urged the Senate and House to provide humanitarian funding and protections for children and families coming to the border. He also opposed the Administration’s request for an increase in detention beds and efforts to strip away fundamental protections for children and asylum seekers ([see the letter](#)).
- On June 18, 2019, USCCB/MRS staff attended a joint NGO meeting with Acting DHS Secretary McAleenan. At the meeting, USCCB/MRS shared our appreciation for the bishops’ conversation with Acting CBP Commissioner Sanders, noted that we welcomed their engagement with on-the-ground partners and the opportunity to serve families, but explained our concerns with how releases were being operationalized. We shared our [letter](#) on this issue and noted that we would welcome further conversation.
- “On June 20, 2019, we celebrated [World Refugee Day](#). We have seen the images of the refugee crisis, and World Refugee Day calls attention to the critical need to assist our refugee brothers and sisters and make them feel a sense of welcome,” said Bishop Vásquez. “It is imperative for us to highlight the contributions refugees make in our communities.”
- On June 21, 2019, Bishop Vásquez sent a letter to members of Congress sharing Pope Francis’ message on Migrants and Refugees (see [statement](#)), describing how Catholics across the United States celebrated World Refugee Day, and sharing a video welcoming refugees in a dozen different languages (see [video](#)). It also described how USCCB/MRS, Catholic Charities USA, and Catholic Charities of Louisville, and Catholic Charities of Oklahoma City briefed 56 House and Senate staffers about the many benefits of refugee resettlement.
- On June 21, 2019, in advance of anticipated immigration enforcement actions, Justice for Immigrants (JFI) circulated its new enforcement resource page. It encouraged JFI members to utilize the resources compiled to help educate their communities about their

rights when interacting with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and ways that they can prepare their families. This resource list can be found on our [JFI website](#).

- On June 21, 2019, USCCB/MRS staff met with official from the Administration's Domestic Policy Council. The meeting focused on the refugee resettlement program, including the request that the Presidential Determination be raised in FY 2020, and the unaccompanied immigrant children program.
- On June 22, 2019, the Bishop Vásquez issued a [Statement](#) in response to imminent administration deportation plans.
- On June 24, 2019, Bishop Vásquez joined USCCB International Justice and Peace and Catholic Relief Services in sending a letter to the House of Representatives in support of the "United States-Northern Triangle Enhanced Engagement Act" (H.R. 2615). The bill authorizes \$577 million to Central America to address root causes of migration, including violence, food insecurity, and lack of economic opportunity. The legislation also prevents funds from being reprogrammed, transferred, or rescinded. Furthermore, it requires the Secretary of State and U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator to prioritize inclusive economic growth and development, anticorruption, and strengthening democratic institutions and security conditions in the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras. Read the letter [here](#).
- On June 26, 2019, the USCCB President and the Migration Committee Chairman described the horrific death of a father and daughter at the border, and appalling conditions for children, are cries that reach heaven itself. "We join with our Holy Father Pope Francis in immense sadness, having seen the horrific images of Oscar Martinez and his daughter Angie Valeria who drowned in the Rio Grande Valley while attempting to flee persecution and enter the United States. This image cries to heaven for justice. This image silences politics. Who can look on this picture and not see the results of the failures of all of us to find a humane and just solution to the immigration crisis? Sadly, this picture shows the daily plight of our brothers and sisters. Not only does their cry reach heaven. It reaches us. And it must now reach our federal government." See [statement](#) here.
- On June 26, 2019, the Senate passed a bipartisan FY19 border supplemental funding bill (84-8). Total funding was \$4.59 billion, including \$2.88 billion for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, mostly to serve unaccompanied children but also to replenish and resume programming for refugees and other ORR populations. It also included \$30 million for the Federal Emergency Management Agency to pay for emergency response to migrating children and families, including by nongovernmental organizations. On June 27, after attempting to add more protections for children and families, the House passed the same bill as the Senate by a vote of 305-102 ([see bill text](#); see [summary](#)), clearing the bill for the President's signature. While the bill did not include all that advocates requested, it did deliver much of the crucial funding and fundamental protections needed by children and families.
- On June 27, 2019, Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop Gomez, and Bishop Vásquez participated in a telephonic meeting with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to discuss with her then-pending legislation to provide supplemental funding for housing unaccompanied children, restore funding for refugee resettlement, protect migrants detained along the U.S. border with Mexico, and provide for border security. The

conversation also focused on efforts that USCCB and Congress should undertake to stop broadscale immigration enforcement actions that the President had recently announced he would undertake in major metropolitan areas across the United States.

- On June 28, 2019, Monsignor Bransfield attended a meeting with senior White House officials and other Catholic organizations. Migration issues were a prominent part of the conversation at the meeting.
- On June 28, 2019, Bishop Vásquez convened a call of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and staff from 10 cities that President Trump designated to receive immigration enforcement actions. Those on the call discussed how they had so far responded to President’s announcement, shared USCCB “Know Your Rights” materials, and discussed possible collaborative responses to the actions. After the call, USCCB/MRS also provided a template for possible statements, if the raids should occur.
- On June 30, 2019, Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop Gomez, and Bishop Vásquez penned an op-ed for The Hill titled “[As a nation we must honor the humanity and basic needs of migrants](#)” which came on the heels of the deaths of Oscar Martinez and his daughter Angie in the Rio Grande River on June 24th. The article by 7/11 had been shared more than 4,300 times on The Hill’s site. Additionally, there were two articles about the op-ed, one in [America Magazine](#) and one written by [Catholic News Service](#). There were more stories on the same subject, one following a statement from the [Border Bishops](#) and several about [Bishop Seitz](#) accompanying asylum seekers across the border.
- On July 2, 2019, Bishop Frank J. Dewane of Venice, Florida, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop Vásquez issued the following [statement](#) regarding last week’s decision by the United States Supreme Court in Department of Commerce v. New York, regarding the importance of ensuring an accurate count for the U.S. Census: “We affirm last week’s decision by the Supreme Court that the inclusion of a citizenship question must ensure genuine reasons for such inclusion. We reaffirm that all persons in the United States should be counted in the Census regardless of their immigration status and reemphasize our judgment that questions regarding citizenship should not be included in the Census. We hope that this view will prevail, whether by administrative action or judicial determination.”
- On July 3, 2019, in response to the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) proposed regulation seeking to prevent mixed-status immigrant families from accessing a range of federal public housing programs, Bishop Vásquez and Bishop Dewane issued a [statement](#) expressing their opposition to the rule. They stated: “[The proposed rule] would force these families to make a heartbreaking choice - endure family separation so that eligible members can continue to receive critical housing assistance or stay together and forfeit any such assistance. This choice between unity and stability is one no family should have to make.” USCCB also [submitted a joint comment](#) with Catholic Charities USA, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., and the Catholic Health Association of the United States urging that HUD withdraw the proposed rule.
- On July 8, 2019, Cardinal DiNardo wrote President Trump expressing opposition to his announced plan to undertake broad enforcement actions to arrest, detain and deport thousands of undocumented persons in ten major metropolitan areas, and urging the President to reconsider the plan.

- On July 8-9, 2019, Archbishop Thomas Wenski and William Canny attended the Consultation on developing pastoral guidelines for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) held in Rome. The guidelines, once approved by the Holy Father, will be published by the Migrants & Refugees Section.
- On July 12, 2019, RCUSA and the Asylum Working Group submitted language recommendations to the staff of Senator Leahy and Representative Lofgren, who will be the Senate and House sponsor of the Refugee Protection Act of 2019. USCCB/MRS staff have been actively collaborating with both groups to help develop consensus recommendations. Ongoing work will occur as the language is finalized and the bill introduced, hopefully before the August recess in both chambers.
- On July 12, 2019, Bishop Richard Pates of Des Moines penned an opinion piece entitled *By caring for migrants we care for ourselves*, published by the Des Moines Register. See piece [here](#).
- On July 16, 2019, Cardinal DiNardo issued a statement condemning the threat of widespread enforcement actions and a new rule drastically limiting asylum. “Enforcement actions like those anticipated this week by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency separate families, cause the unacceptable suffering of thousands of children and their parents, and create widespread panic in our communities. I condemn such an approach, which has created a climate of fear in our parishes and communities across the country.” Read the full statement [here](#).