



MIGRANTS REFUGEES

Building a Church that Goes to the Peripheries: How best to serve those on the margins in our own country

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This past June, Archbishop José Gómez invited me to address a Conference at Mundelein of Bishops and leaders in the field of migration from our part of the Americas about a ***Church Without Borders***,¹ and I spoke via Zoom. Today, I am happy to really be in Chicago at your ninth biennial Catholic Extension Conference: “*Let Us Dream Together: Pope Francis’ Vision for the Church*”.

Your planning group asked me to develop the theme about ***Building a Church that Goes to the Peripheries*** and touch on several aspects:

- Pope Francis’s vision for the Church and how it applies in the conditions of the pandemic.
- Resisting the virus of indifference, even in the Church, and the temptation to simply “go back to normal”.
- How can the Church in America be a beacon of hope and a voice of justice at home and abroad?
- How might the American Church give witness to the face of Christ present in migrants?

I’ll do my best to address all these topics in the following order: peripheries, migration and the pandemic; Pope Francis’s vision for the Church; and finally, our own conversion and planning. This order might surprise you. Shouldn’t we listen first to our current pope? I certainly would not rule that out! However, if the shepherds are to have the smell of the sheep, if our leadership is to engage genuinely with the real issues faced by those whom we serve, then we first need an unfiltered view of what’s going on. So let’s check the reality, and then appreciate the vision of the Church that the Pope articulates.

¹ See June “Mundelein speech”

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZrlqBL3iBrOZc9tNwDUN3WXzCUeJpnY5/edit?usp=sharing&oid=115469130088996410584&rtpof=true&sd=true>

That's why I follow the *see-judge-act* approach, which was initiated in the Young Christian Workers movement by Fr. Joseph Cardijn and has been carried forward by the Holy Fathers from St John XXIII to Pope Francis. It has us continually ask:

- What do we see, hear, experience?
- What do we think, appreciate, judge?
- How do we respond, plan, program?

Short answer: we endeavor to see, judge and act according to Scripture, Tradition, Vatican II, and Catholic Social Teaching.

1. The existential peripheries

On 9 March 2013, Archbishop Bergoglio of Buenos Aires concluded his electrifying 5-minute address to his fellow electors with the hope that the next Pope would be “a man who, through the contemplation of Jesus Christ and the adoration of Jesus Christ, may help the Church to go out from itself toward the existential peripheries, that may help it to be the fecund mother who lives ‘by the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing’.” It was to become a key generative image of Pope Francis’s magisterium.

For example, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis used the word “periphery” seven times. But the English translator seemed allergic to the word, using it once in quotes (EG 20) and otherwise translating it as “outskirts” and “fringes”. Do either of these words help? This might seem an unnecessary worry but, since peripheries are hard for us to perceive, even harder to grasp, and really hardest to take responsibility for, I think the word is worth underlining. Consider this statement: “Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes [periferias] or its disenfranchised – they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the “exploited” but the outcast, the “leftovers”” (EG 53) And again: “All of us are asked to obey [the Lord’s] call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG 20).

In *Fratelli tutti* under the sub-heading “*Open societies that integrate everyone*”, Pope Francis gives us an existential reading of “peripheral”:

Some peripheries are close to us, in city centers or within our families. Hence there is an aspect of universal openness in love that is existential rather than geographical. It has to do with our daily efforts to expand our circle of friends, to reach those who, even though they are close to me, I do not naturally consider a part of my circle of interests. Every brother or sister in need, when abandoned or ignored by the society in which I live, becomes an existential foreigner, even though born in the same country. They may be

citizens with full rights, yet they are treated like foreigners in their own country. Racism is a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding, and lurks in waiting. (FT 97)

As applied by Pope Francis to society, to certain people and places within the territory of each diocese (or of the whole Church in a country), “periphery” describes a people’s condition and indeed suffering, but also identifies what an individual Christian or Christian community can perceive, appreciate, and respond to.

No one is useless, in the words of *Fratelli tutti*, and no one is expendable. Each of us, moreover, can learn something from others. This means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. “For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centers of power where weighty decisions are made”. To represent a society or a Diocese “where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations”, Pope Francis proposes the image of a polyhedron and a new culture of encounter. (cf FT 215).

II. Not migration but migrants

I would guess that migration is an element in the personal or family history of most of you, if not all. Perhaps like me, some of you were children when your family switched continents or at least countries. And of course, American history is shaped by different types of migrants, from hopeful early settlement by English colonizers, through the devastating African slave trade, all the way to the presence of migrant workers from Central America and Mexico, the current desperate new arrivals from Afghanistan, and the constant, fully understandable pressure on the southern U.S. border. Along the way, migrants have greatly contributed to the face of the Church here. Think of the Irish escaping the potato famine in the mid-19th century. And the Italian influx was so significant that the Scalabrinian order (or the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Charles Borromeo) was founded in 1887 to serve the Italian diaspora. Happily, I have Fr. Fabio Baggio, a Scalabrinian, as my co-Undersecretary for Migrants and Refugees.

Let’s turn to what is going on right now. How shall we, particularly as Bishops, regard the vulnerable people on the move within American diocesan territories? Their movement can take place in different directions: arriving and in transit; staying permanently or departing for good, perhaps to return to a previous homeland; or seasonal comings-and-goings. In your Diocese you can have several of these situations at the same time, or even all of them. I mention this to suggest that, to begin taking hold of this pastoral challenge, the first thing we need is help to perceive accurately what is going on; or, in other words, to research, as in “searching for the lost sheep”.

Very soon after the Migrants & Refugees Section began its work, Pope Francis addressed an international forum on “Migration and Peace” and spelled out the four moments or dimensions of a shared, coordinated and effective response in the form of four verbs: *to welcome*, *to protect*, *to promote* and *to integrate*.² His remarks reflected the second phase in the see-judge-act methodology – thinking, interpreting and understanding as genuinely as possible so as to judge fairly and prudently – and doing this in the interests of the third phase, namely to guide action. Here is some explanation of these verbs, which take on added significance when applied to another context such as the COVID pandemic.

1) The obvious first step is *to welcome* those who are in flight, in jeopardy, in need of a new and better place. It’s as obvious as the Statue of Liberty with its wonderful welcoming poem about a new home for the homeless, about relief for the tempest tossed. It can be as simple as finding a traveler at your door, as in many Bible stories; it can also be very complicated in our modern administrative procedures.

In Catholic Social Teaching terms, we can link welcoming to the virtue of solidarity—the notion that we are all responsible for all, not just people within our own borders. Those borders can be national frontiers, but also the dividing lines between adjacent communities – think of the people from the so-called ‘wrong side of the tracks’.

Let’s think for a moment about all those borders. They are human contrivances, and we have to be careful. God did not draw those lines. And since the publication of the USCCB’s pastoral letter on racism in 2018, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love”,³ the Dioceses have redoubled efforts to identify and overcome borders of race and structures of supremacy.

2) Second, the requirement *to protect* reflects the complex reality facing people in the midst of major changes. They may have difficulty escaping an oppressive past. They may be easily confused or lost in unfamiliar surroundings. As we have seen in our migrant and refugee research, unprotected new arrivals can become ensnared in human trafficking. And as some of you undoubtedly have seen, it can be as difficult and dangerous to cross from one side of town to the other in some places, as it is to cross international borders in some places. There can be a propensity for ‘us’ to be suspicious of ‘them’, be they newcomers from foreign lands or the other side of town or the state or the country. In that atmosphere, and with the tendencies towards loudly expressed anger and even physical violence, it is vital to stand up for ‘them’ and protect them.

3) Third, *to promote* reflects a fulsome respect for human rights, which in turn flows from the inherent dignity of every human being. What rights, what dignity? Clearly it’s more than the

² Pope Francis, Address to the International Forum on “Migration and Peace”, 21.02.2017.

³ <https://usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts.pdf>

absence of unjust constraints and absence of threat, which are addressed by *welcome* and *protect*, In the famous formulation of Erich Fromm, those have to do with “freedom from.” This is completed by “freedom to”, that is, the conditions under which humans can blossom and flourish.

You have probably supported this sort of promotion within your Dioceses: programs designed to help kids and adults to develop themselves, to achieve more in their education and work. It applies to migrants too, beginning with the right to migrate in times of need. As St. John XXIII stated in *Pacem in Terris*, “among man's personal rights we must include his right to enter a country in which he hopes to be able to provide more fittingly for himself and his dependents. It is therefore the duty of State officials to accept such immigrants and—so far as the good of their own community, rightly understood, permits—to further the aims of those who may wish to become members of a new society.” That is, the aim of flourishing for oneself and one’s family must be accommodated or promoted, not blocked.

The undeniable right of every human being to personal development calls for the promotion of integral human development — the fullest development of each person and all people, allowing them to become active agents of their own development. In the case of migrants and refugees, this applies in countries of origin as well as places of transit, and destination. Before the right to migrate, states should guarantee the right not to have to migrate. All people must have the right to remain in their homelands, living lives of dignity, peace, and security. This might be relevant to your Diocese. Are some people leaving or thinking of doing so? How can we make the local community a place of real flourishing such that our people don’t chase off after ‘the bright city lights’ and ‘the streets paved with gold’ elsewhere?

4) Finally, *to integrate* is both the fourth and the ultimate moment in the process. We all know what it means. A person who is truly integrated feels completely included; social distance has disappeared, psychological barriers have dissolved. As Americans, you know the immense importance of integration and the continuing tragedies of segregation. Whether we’re talking about people within this country striving for acceptance and fair opportunity or about newcomers seeking a better life, let us admit that if we welcome, protect and promote, the job is not finished. The last step is the beautiful but slow process of going from “them” to “us”, from dependents to full participants, from ‘objects’ of our generosity (or even legal responsibility) to fellow-citizens and, indeed, fellow-“integrators” to others.

Another dimension of integration is mutual enrichment. Without our paying attention to it, integration is always a two-way process, based on openness, on appreciative encounter, and recognition of the other’s spiritual and cultural richness. It’s that marvelous two-way movement from knowing about one another, to actually knowing one another; from helping other people

meet their needs, towards the care of kith and kin. *To integrate* aims ultimately at friendship. That is the blessed state that Pope Francis constantly encourages everyone to pursue.

Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating apply to engagement with all the peripheries. The insight comes from migrant and refugee work but it applies to making our society right for people with disabilities, to overcoming barriers against full inclusion of minorities, to overcoming intergenerational poverty in our cities and so on. I would be grateful to hear your examples. Even if your Diocese is not on the border, there are vulnerable people on the move throughout U.S. society, but -- typical of people on the periphery -- they're usually invisible. So the first step, in each Diocese, is to see them, encounter them, share their experience and eventually take a few steps in their shoes.

I hope you can take a shared approach in your work with migrants and refugees. The "borders" are everywhere throughout the U.S.A. -- yes, along the Rio Grande, and there are also vulnerable people on the move hiding, stuck, invisible in every diocese, including the "Extension" ones. As they move from Haiti, Central America and elsewhere, through Mexico and into the United States, they shouldn't feel like they're moving through different churches but within one "borderless" Church. They should experience, as much as possible, a continuity of pastoral accompaniment and care: welcomed on arrival and protected, promoted and integrated there, or if moving on, sent to another welcoming community of one and the same Church.

III. The Pandemic

The on-going Covid-19 emergency has been testing the physical, mental and social endurance of entire nations. Like a magnifying glass, it has revealed the weaknesses of social organization and the vulnerability of many people.

Running up against our worldwide vulnerability without exceptions, has been a real shock; and we've been surprised at the dramatic evidence of our interdependence. This has occurred in the context of suffering and fear. Pope Francis captured this in his *Urbi et Orbi* homily on 27 March 2020, barely a month into the pandemic. Quoting the Gospel of the Storm at Sea (Mark 4:35-41), the Holy Father gave deep-felt expression to how adrift we felt: "Like the disciples in the Gospel we were caught off guard by an unexpected, turbulent storm."⁴ But unlike that incident, which affected a few fishers in one modest boat, this is a worldwide phenomenon: everyone on earth is at risk, and the planet is the one vast boat for all of us: "we are on the same boat, all of us fragile

⁴ Pope Francis, *Why are you afraid? Have you no faith? The world facing the pandemic - Statio Orbis March 27, 2020*, LEV and OSV, 2021.

and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat... are all of us.”⁵

But on this one global boat, we’re not all on the same deck or in the same class. Think, for example, of the basic and essential services—such as healthcare, food, maintenance, security, and deliveries etc.—which have been keeping society running during the darkest days. Many who provide them, putting their own health at risk, are migrants, refugees, and seasonal workers. They were taken for granted and rarely noticed until COVID stopped them from working or from even crossing a border to reach the workplace.

To make an already bad situation worse, in times of economic crisis, many people look for scapegoats, and too often during the pandemic, migrants and refugees have been demonized, blamed for spreading sickness, with loud voices claiming that keeping ‘us’ safe means keeping others out.

I have been emphasizing the impact on workers. The picture is much broader, of course. Here is how Francis articulated his sympathy for some other groups: “How difficult it is to stay at home for those who live in tiny, ramshackle dwellings, or for the homeless! How difficult it is for migrants, those who are deprived of freedom, and those in rehabilitation from an addiction”.⁶

I don’t need to go on. You yourselves know, far more than I can know from a distance, what this scourge has meant in your communities. It suffices for me to observe that COVID-19 has exposed some of the major fault-lines in society—the pathologies of individualism and indifference that give rise to grave and growing inequality, unrelieved and unrelenting sufferings, too many scandalous reasons for despair, and the despoliation of our common home.

It is worth noting how the Pope has framed a proper response. In his regular Wednesday general audiences of August and September a year ago, he applied seven basic principles of Catholic Social Teaching to our Covid-gripped societies. Listen to his inspiring alternative, counter-cultural, Gospel-based way of living through this difficult time and thinking about a better future.

1) Preparing a real life for all begins with recognizing the *dignity* of each human being, each of us with our unique richness, since we are created in the image and likeness of God.⁷

⁵ Pope Francis, Urbi et orbi, Adoration in St Peter’s. “Why are you afraid?”

⁶ Pope Francis, Easter letter to Popular Movements, “To an invisible army”.

⁷ *CSDC*, 108-110.

2) Next, to promote people and heal the world, resources are needed for everyone, and the principle of the *universal destination of goods* reminds us that the bounty of creation is intended for all, not just a few.⁸

3) & 4) Generating a new world requires that we apply the principles of the *common good* and *care for our common home*. “A virus that does not recognize barriers, borders, or cultural or political distinctions must be faced with a love without barriers, borders or distinctions”,⁹ the Pope insists. “To come out of this pandemic better than we went in, we must let ourselves be touched by others' pain.”¹⁰

5) *Solidarity* informs the moral obligation to a fair "distribution of goods and remuneration for work"¹¹ and guides us on how best to cooperate. The common good must be promoted by governments and international organizations¹² but not exclusively – people, civic organizations, religions and local communities cannot be left out in the design of the new world.¹³

6) *Subsidiarity* integrates all the levels of the social body, from the smallest and farthest away in the peripheries, to the highest levels of decision makers. The pandemic has taught us that the best policies are built on both the participation and dignity of persons and the integrity of communities.

7) Finally, the *preferential option for the poor* is at the centre of the Gospel, as the Pope explains, and should be at the centre of our present awareness and action. Jesus called us to recognise him and ourselves by our “closeness to the poor... the sick... and the forgotten” (cf. Mt 25:31-36).¹⁴

We should not hear these messages in piecemeal fashion. Rather, they bring us to Pope Francis’s vision for the Church.

IV. Pope Francis’s vision for the Church

Having thought about existential peripheries, and vulnerable people on the move, and covid making everyone vulnerable, let’s appreciate Pope Francis’s vision of/for the Church.

A post Covid-19 world has to be more just, inclusive and sustainable: “On the one hand, it is essential to find a cure for this small but terrible virus, which has brought the whole world to its knees. On the other, we must also cure a larger virus, that of social injustice, inequality of opportunity, marginalisation, and the lack of protection for the weakest.”¹⁵ So the Pope invites us

⁸ Cf. *Laudato Si: On the Care for Our Common Home* (LS), 67.

⁹ Pope Francis, General Audience, 9.09.2020. [Catechesis “Healing the world”: 6. Love and the common good.](#)

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Opinion in The New York Times*, 26.11.2020.

¹¹ CCC, 1940.

¹² Cf. EG, 240.

¹³ Cf. LS, 63.

¹⁴ CCC, 2443.

¹⁵ EG, 198.

to join him on a new journey, a pilgrimage illumined by the Gospel of Christ, our Savior and Healer, and by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. The Holy Father urges us to “keep our gaze firmly fixed on Jesus” (Heb. 12:2) and “with this faith [to] embrace the hope of the Kingdom of God that Jesus Himself brings us (cf. Mk 1:5; Mt 4:17)¹⁶ ... a kingdom that is manifested through works of charity [love] (1 Cor 13:13)”.¹⁷

St Francis of Assisi heard Jesus call to him: “Go repair my Church, which, as you see, is falling completely into ruin.” The new pope took the name of Francis and, soon after his election, laid out his programme in *Evangelii gaudium* (November 2013) “on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world” because only a Church continually undergoing repair can really bring the good news everywhere that it’s needed. In a nutshell: “I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (EG 27).

About a year and a half later, in mid-2015, this evangelizing thrust called for “dialogue with all people about our common home” (LS 3). Rather than an ecological distraction from the mission of the Church, *Laudato si’* applies the evangelizing logic of *Evangelii gaudium* to “questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (LS 49). Francis’s vision of the Church culminates in this most exalted mysticism: “Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (LS 240). Less obvious but more to the point for Bishops, the Encyclical’s 5th chapter is all about dialogue. Yes, dialogue is how we get to care for our common home.

In October 2019, the Amazon Synod put *EG* and *LS* to a most rigorous test, and it tested me, too. The subtitle expressed the challenge: to look for “new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology”. It took half the Synod for me to shake the feeling that these were two themes. But listening, I learned: not some paths over here for the pious, and other paths over there for the greens; not two themes scotch-taped together. Rather, like the people of the Amazon themselves: citizens at once of the Church and of the world, needing both, loving both, caring for both. “Setting others free from their forms of bondage surely involves caring for the environment and defending it, but, even more, helping the human heart to be open with trust to the God who not only has created all that exists, but has also given us himself in Jesus Christ” (QA 41).

And in full pandemic, a year ago we received *Fratelli tutti* (3 Oct 2020): on siblings all and social friendship: "Either we are brothers and sisters, or everything fails [and] we destroy each

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 2816.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, General Audience, 5.08.2020. [Catechesis “Healing the World”: 1. Introduction.](#)

other. Brother- and sister-hood is the frontier on which we must build, the challenge of our century, the challenge of our times"¹⁸. To the urgency of rebuilding the Church and responding to the socio-environmental crisis, Francis adds an even more radical call to shared responsibility as siblings. He elaborates on the culture of encounter, on dialogue and friendship in society, on political love, and on paths of renewed encounter that include reconciliation and forgiveness. Neither the Church nor the world can be repaired if the terrible oppositions persist: indigenous peoples versus settlers, women against men, cities depopulating the rural countryside, North-vs-South and so on.

And from now until October 2023, the Synod on synodality. Here is the opportunity to pull the previous steps together into an ongoing process, turning the word “Church” into verbs: repairing, functioning, serving, becoming. “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word ‘synod.’ Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.”¹⁹ The theme is “for a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission”. Synodality refers to the very essence of the Church, her constitutive reality, and is thus oriented towards evangelization. It is an ecclesial way of being and a prophetic way of serving today's world.

So the vision of Pope Francis for the Church is not like a landscape, much less a portrait; rather it is more like unfolding and converging paths; and you don't so much think as walk your way into being Church. To be Church is to synod.

V. Conversion and Planning

The invitation to address this Conference has challenged me to think about “extension” in relation to “peripheries”. Pope Francis’s teaching on peripheries, clearly applied to migrants and refugees and then to the pandemic, connects with a praxis of “extension.” We see that in several expressions -- *Church Without Borders*, *Church in Extension*, *Church that goes to the Peripheries* -- that suggest one and the same mystery and mission. What does this pairing of terms mean for us now?

First, “Extension” dioceses each have their own peripheries. There are people in your diocese who are on the margins, excluded, overlooked, invisible. How can you notice or perceive them? How to understand and appreciate them? How to respond evangelically and ecclesially to them?

Then, the mother Church in the U.S.A, provides financial aid so that the Extension dioceses can support themselves and minister to over 15 million American Catholics. But compared with the

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Video-address to the International Day of Human Fraternity*, 4.02.2021.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 17.10.2015.

mainstream and better-resourced dioceses, the Extension dioceses are indeed marginal, under-privileged and needy, and peripheral. Not only to have peripheries, but to be peripheral: What does it mean to the Dioceses / to their Bishop / to God's people there?

Finally, let's consider what this can mean for the whole Church in the U.S.A. Pope Francis dreams of a Church that's like a field hospital whose compassionate engagement is modeled by the Good Samaritan. A Church that "extends itself" to the peripheries. Perhaps we can see this as an update of what Pope Pius X wanted for the Extension approach in the early 1900s: "To turn all your zeal solely and exclusively to the good of the citizens". This sounds like an early expression for integral human development, which over the decades Catholic Social Teaching clarified as the real, long-term objective. Integral human development is the answer to exclusion and peripheries, and the answer for migrants and refugees, and the answer for our Extension dioceses.

In many places, it requires a conversion, a major reset, to become a field-hospital Church that welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates those from the peripheries. One 'gift' you can offer your mainstream diocese colleagues is to dialogue with them. This is probably the easiest way for the overall Church in the U.S.A. to convert to the dream or vision we have shared here.

To capture this comprehensive "dream" which comes more and more into focus from Vatican II to *Fratelli tutti*, to capture it and implement it, we need to translate the dreaming into pastoral planning and praxis. While the Pope's "dream" and each Bishop's share of the dream are inspiring, it's only in the form of pastoral planning that they'll have a chance of being effective.

Here are some examples of pastoral planning that I have gleaned from our Migrants and Refugees Section's consultation with bishops in the U.S.A., Canada, Mexico and Central America. I hope these opportunities will stimulate your reflections and planning for the particular circumstances of your territories:

1. The pandemic teaches us to be more intentional about taking notice of the presence of people on the move in our communities. With the help of tools such as the CARA mapping by the USCCB's Subcommittee on the Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees & Travelers,²⁰ we can 'see' the communities of migrants throughout the United States, the borders within our own communities, and those places where the Church is engaged in the pastoral care of people on the move. It will show where there is still work to be done, whether because the local Church has

²⁰ *The Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees and Travelers Worship Site Inventory and Demographic Study*, Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) Georgetown University Washington, D.C. June 2021
<https://cara.georgetown.edu/PCMRTRReport.pdf>

neglected the peripheries or because its grasp of the realities is incomplete. I understand that these tools are ready for your use as of this Conference.

2. In a world still marked by inter-religious tensions and conflict among nations, our solidarity with those displaced by the turmoil in Afghanistan is an important evangelical testimony. The bishops of the United States and Catholic social service agencies have stood up admirably to provide assistance in resettling newly arriving Afghan refugees. How can we bring this experience down to the grassroots level so that individual parishes can be involved in this ministry of welcome? ²¹ Local communities helping with accompaniment and integration will themselves be transformed in the process, and thus pull the issue of migration out of the abstract domain of political and media discourse. At best, Catholic groups can do this work in concert and partnership with other churches and faith communities, thus bridging divides and advancing the important task of ecumenical and interfaith witness.

3. In some ways, asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border, increasing in numbers since 2014, are more vulnerable than conventional refugees who arrive with a certain immigration status with its services and some security. Those crossing arrive in every corner of the country. How are our churches showing a preferential option for these persons, who oftentimes cannot work legally, are made invisible in manifold ways, and are scapegoated by seesaw politics? The wounded person on the side of the road needs the Good Samaritan's attention. Systematic and structured charity is indispensable, but so is the creative engagement of those in the pews as well as our seminarians and those in formation for diaconal and lay ministry;²² those who work in our chanceries; and our clergy in ongoing formation. This is part of the pastoral conversion demanded by *Evangelii gaudium*, which should touch all of our institutions. The bishops' Catholic Campaign for Human Development can be an important resource to help stimulate this local work to organize community action.

Which of these can you adopt and adapt? What excellent initiatives in your Diocese should be added, shared among you, shared with people of good will of other faiths who also want to reach out to the wounded stranger? Please send your accounts to the Migrants and Refugees Section, where we will put them into our world-wide network.

VI. Conclusion

²¹ *Afghan refugees and the Good Samaritans of Twitter* Shanon Last America Magazine September 3, 2021
<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/09/03/afghanistan-refugees-amazon-wish-list-241323>

²² *Seminarian immersion program yields a harvest of pastoral experience*. John Gehring, National Catholic Reporter August 30, 2021
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/seminarian-immersion-program-yields-harvest-pastoral-experience>

Just as the perilous state of the natural and social environments drive Pope Francis to propose one, shared *common home*, so too does the worldwide aspect of desperately fleeing migrants. All local churches are affected by the reality of human mobility, as sending communities, communities of transit, communities of destination and communities of return. Even the people in this room come from many origins. This is the work of the Lord.

While not minimizing the complexities and grave challenges which the reality of vulnerable migrants can represent, we can be confident that Providence is somehow present in the steps traced by the most vulnerable as they cross Mesoamerica and raft the waters of the Caribbean. Migration is both a reflection of a world yet in growing pains and a call to deeper solidarity.

Let us not fail to notice this mysterious Stranger in our midst, calling the churches of north and south together for a common testimony, a common witness and common ministry to address the injustices at the root of forced displacement -- indifference, alienation and misery. Seen through the prism of the Redemption, the tears, sacrifices and even the deaths of the most vulnerable must be a mysterious contribution to the building and rebuilding of our common home, marked by greater compassion, justice and communion.

After all, the Statue of Liberty still stands, even when some federal, state or local leaders and citizens are hostile towards immigration. The Church can step in and add her voice, too.

*“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

With that, I happily turn the floor over to you for dialogue that makes good on this compelling vision of the Holy Father: “Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all” (FT 8).