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Bishops and Faith Leaders From South Stand With Immigrant Families in Knoxville

KNOXVILLE, TN. — Catholic bishops and faith leaders from Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, North Carolina, Alabama, and West Virginia gathered yesterday on the steps of the Cathedral of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Ecumenical and business partners joined them to stand with immigrant families living in fear under policies of mass deportation.

The press conference was part of *Deepening Our Moral Witness*, a regional gathering hosted by the Diocese of Knoxville and the Diocese of Lexington, convened by the Catholic Immigrant Prophetic Action Project (Catholic IMMpact), an initiative of the Hope Border Institute and the Center for Migration Studies of New York. The gathering trained nearly 200 clergy, religious, Catholic Charities workers, communications directors, Hispanic ministry leaders and parish social ministry leaders in church teaching on migration and best practices in accompanying those affected by policies of mass deportations. The events took place against the backdrop of increased immigration enforcement action in Tennessee and surrounding states.

'Families across the region in the south are living with fear, which has become part of daily life,' said **Dylan Corbett, Executive Director of the Hope Border Institute**. 'Parents think twice before driving to work, going to Mass, picking kids up from school. Children are listening for a knock at the door. These aren't strangers. They're parishioners, coworkers, neighbors.'

'We have a responsibility to care for the dignity of each and every human person and to respect the rights and due process that are due to citizens and anyone who lives on U.S. soil,' said **Most Rev. Mark Beckman, Bishop of Knoxville**. 'What we see needs a response not only of compassion, but also of justice. Let's work together today to build a world where everyone has a home.'

'Migrants and refugees are not an issue, not a problem to be solved, and not a population to be managed. They are members of the one human family,' said **Most Rev. John Stowe, OFM**

Conv., Bishop of Lexington. 'Complexity is not an excuse for cruelty. Our migrant brothers and sisters have suffered enough. It's time to end the cruelty.'

'Increasingly, fear and chaos and brutality appear to be the point in immigration policy,' said **Rt. Rev. Brian Lee Cole, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee.** 'God has made us all, and we all belong to each other.'

'For us, immigration is not an abstract issue. We live it every day,' said **Yuri Cunza, president and CEO of the Nashville Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.** 'Behind every economic number is a person, behind every worker is a family and behind every immigration case is a human story. We can protect our country without forgetting who we are as a country.'

During questions from reporters, **Most Rev. David Talley, Bishop of Memphis,** said: 'This is not a political issue. It's a moral issue.' **Bishop Stowe** added: 'Pro-life begins with understanding that each person, made in the image and likeness of God, is given inalienable rights. That doesn't require documents. That doesn't require papers.'

In addition to those mentioned above, Most Rev. Gregory Hartmayer, Archbishop of Atlanta; Most Rev. Evelio Menjivar-Ayala, Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston; Most Rev. John Nhàn Trần, Auxiliary Bishop of Atlanta also participated in the gathering and press conference.

The gathering brought together clergy, religious, Catholic Charities workers, social ministry, Hispanic ministry and communications staff from dioceses across the south and Appalachia. They came from the Archdioceses of Atlanta and Louisville; the Dioceses of Charleston, Knoxville, Lexington, Memphis, Nashville, Owensboro and Wheeling-Charleston; and the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee. Participants spent the afternoon planning diocesan and parish responses.

[Video of Press Conference](#) (Credit: Diocese of Knoxville)

[Photos](#) (Credit: East Tennessee Catholic)

More [Photos](#) (Credit: Hope Border Institute)

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The **Diocese of Knoxville** comprises 51 parishes and mission churches serving approximately 78,000 Catholics across 36 counties in East Tennessee. Established in 1988, the Diocese continues to grow in faith and service throughout the region. For more information, please visit www.dioknox.org

The **Catholic Diocese of Lexington** serves 50 counties in Eastern and Central Kentucky through its parishes, schools, and ministries. Under the leadership of Most Rev. Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., the missionary Diocese is dedicated to sharing the Gospel, serving those in need, and promoting the dignity of every person. Learn more at www.cdlex.org.

The **Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee** comprises 46 parishes and communities serving approximately 13,000 Episcopalians across East Tennessee and North Georgia. Established in

1985, the Diocese of East Tennessee seeks to equip disciples of Jesus Christ to grow and be grounded in the reconciling witness of the Gospel, for the love of our neighbors and all of God's creation. For more information, please visit www.dioet.org.

The **Hope Border Institute (HOPE)** is the premier strategy center for faith leaders pursuing justice at the US-Mexico border. Through a robust program of research and policy work, leadership development and action, we work to build justice and deepen solidarity across the borderlands. Learn more at www.hopeborder.org.

The **Center for Migration Studies (CMS)** is a New York-based educational institute devoted to the study of international migration, to the promotion of understanding between immigrants and receiving communities, and to public policies that safeguard the dignity and rights of migrants, refugees, and newcomers. For more information, please visit www.cmsny.org.

About Catholic IMMpact: The Catholic Immigrant Prophetic Action Project (Catholic IMMpact) is an initiative of the Hope Border Institute and the Center for Migration Studies of New York. It accompanies dioceses in standing with communities affected by policies of mass deportation. Learn more at catholicimmimpact.org.