

A Path Toward Justice

A National Prayer Service

Honoring the Many Journeys that Shaped America



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

Photo / Diocese of
Brownsville

A Path Toward Justice: A National Prayer Service Honoring the Many Journeys that Shaped America

INSTRUCTIONS

In observance of the United States' 250th Anniversary in 2026, and rooted in the Church's pastoral mission of welcome, accompaniment, and solidarity, the purpose of this prayer service is to acknowledge and honor the many diverse communities that have journeyed to the United States in search of hope, safety, and opportunity, while also recognizing the voices, sufferings, and enduring contributions of those who were forcibly brought to this land. This resource offers a template for a prayer service for immigrants that may be celebrated at a variety of sites or points of entry throughout the country.

Inspired by the Gospel call to welcome the stranger and uphold the dignity of every human person, this prayer service seeks to provide a sacred space for reflection, remembrance, lament, and hope. Through Scripture, ritual prayer, music, and communal reflection, participants are invited to encounter one another as members of the one human family and the one Body of Christ.

Organizers are encouraged to appropriately adapt this template in ways that resonate more deeply with the pastoral realities and cultural experiences of those gathered. This may include incorporating hymns, intercessions, testimonies, symbolic gestures, and devotional or liturgical elements that retain the beauty of our Catholic faith while reflecting the richness of local communities and their lived experiences of migration, displacement, resilience, and faith.

A Spanish version of this template is also available.

OPENING HYMN: BE NOT AFRAID BY BOB DUFFORD, S.J.

[The celebrant, ministers and the faithful enter the prayer service venue while the choir sings "Be Not Afraid" by Bob Dufford, S.J. **Note:** Organizers are welcome to choose a different hymn/song.]

WORDS OF WELCOME

[The presiding minister opens the prayer service with the following or similar words:]

As the United States commemorates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we join in this national observance with gratitude and hope, honoring the many immigrant communities whose faith, labor, cultures, and sacrifices have helped shape this nation into what it is today. In a spirit of remembrance and thanksgiving, we also recognize their struggles, aspirations, and enduring dreams for

future generations, while acknowledging with humility the voices and lived experiences of those who were forcibly brought to this land.

Gathered in prayer before our Heavenly Father, God of hope, freedom, justice and peace, we ask for the grace to walk in deeper solidarity with immigrant communities, each of which enriches the life of this nation through the diversity of its gifts and traditions. May the Holy Spirit strengthen us to uphold the God-given dignity of every human person, to welcome the stranger with compassion, and to advocate for policies that provide greater protection, justice, and accompaniment for vulnerable and at-risk migrant populations.

In this moment of national celebration and reflection, may our prayer renew our commitment to building a society rooted in mercy, justice and peace, and the common good, so that all who journey in search of safety, opportunity, and belonging may find not only refuge, but also the recognition of their inherent dignity as children of God.

SIGN OF THE CROSS

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

R: Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini, our first American Saint, pray for us.

You came to the United States as an immigrant yourself, and worked tirelessly on behalf of the poor, the sick, and the otherwise marginalized who arrived on our shores.

As the Patroness of immigrants, you have a special concern for those displaced from their homeland and in search of a new life elsewhere. You understand their sufferings and the challenges they face as they navigate a new world in search of a new home.

St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, intercede for migrant families who are separated from one another, protect them from exploitation, and keep them safe.

May we, O Blessed Frances Xavier Cabrini, receive through your prayers the grace to open our hearts so that we may provide hospitality for all who come in search of refuge. Give us the courage to welcome every stranger as Christ in our midst.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever.

R: Amen.

[**Note:** This prayer is available [on this USCCB webpage.](#)]



READINGS:

First Reading: Deuteronomy 10:12-22

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy

Moses said to the people:

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord, your God, ask of you
but to fear the Lord, your God, and follow his ways exactly,
to love and serve the LORD, your God,
with all your heart and all your soul,
to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD
which I enjoin on you today for your own good?

Think! The heavens, even the highest heavens,
belong to the LORD, your God,
as well as the earth and everything on it.

Yet in his love for your fathers the LORD was so attached to them
as to choose you, their descendants,
in preference to all other peoples, as indeed he has now done.

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and be no longer stiff-necked.

For the LORD, your God, is the God of gods,
the LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome,
who has no favorites, accepts no bribes;
who executes justice for the orphan and the widow,
and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him.

So you too must befriend the alien,
for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.

The LORD, your God, shall you fear, and him shall you serve;
hold fast to him and swear by his name.

He is your glory, he, your God,
who has done for you those great and terrible things
which your own eyes have seen.

Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy strong,
and now the LORD, your God,
has made you as numerous as the stars of the sky.”

The word of the Lord.



Psalm 146:5-6ab, 6c-7, 8-9a, 9bc-10

R. (1b) Praise the Lord, my soul!

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord, his God,
Who made heaven and earth,
the sea and all that is in them.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The Lord keeps faith forever,
secures justice for the oppressed,
gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets captives free.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The Lord gives sight to the blind.
The Lord raises up those who were bowed down;
The Lord loves the just.
The Lord protects strangers.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.
The Lord shall reign forever;
your God, O Zion, through all generations. Alleluia.

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!

Second Reading: Hebrews 13:1-3, 5-8, 12-16, 20-21

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Let brotherly love continue.
Do not neglect hospitality,
for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.
Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment,
and of the ill-treated as of yourselves,
for you also are in the body.

Let your life be free from love of money
but be content with what you have,
for he has said, *I will never forsake you or abandon you.*

Thus we may say with confidence:

The Lord is my helper,

*and I will not be afraid.
What can anyone do to me?*

Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.
Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the gate,
to consecrate the people by his own Blood.
Let us then go to him outside the camp,
bearing the reproach that he bore.
For here we have no lasting city,
but we seek the one that is to come.
Through him then let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise,
that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.
Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have;
God is pleased by sacrifices of that kind.

May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead,
the great shepherd of the sheep
by the Blood of the eternal covenant,
furnish you with all that is good, that you may do his will.
May he carry out in you what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ,
to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The word of the Lord.

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Jesus said to his disciples:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory,
and all the angels with him,
he will sit upon his glorious throne,
and all the nations will be assembled before him.

And he will separate them one from another,
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right,
‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father.

Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,



a stranger and you welcomed me,
naked and you clothed me,
ill and you cared for me,
in prison and you visited me.’
Then the righteous will answer him and say,
‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,
or thirsty and give you drink?
When did we see you a stranger and welcome you,
or naked and clothe you?
When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’
And the king will say to them in reply,
‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did
for these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’
Then he will say to those on his left,
‘Depart from me, you accursed,
into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.
For I was hungry and you gave me no food,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
a stranger and you gave me no welcome,
naked and you gave me no clothing,
ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’
Then they will answer and say,
‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty
or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison,
and not minister to your needs?’
He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you,
what you did not do for one of these least ones,
you did not do for me.’
And these will go off to eternal punishment,
but the righteous to eternal life.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

TESTIMONIES

[Consider incorporating testimonies into the prayer service as a way of lifting up the voices, struggles, faith, and hopes of migrants, immigrants and refugees within the community. A testimony offered by a community member or a family relative can serve as a powerful witness to the human dignity, resilience, and spiritual journey of those who have migrated in search of safety, opportunity, and belonging. In order to safeguard the well-being and privacy of those sharing their stories, a pre-recorded testimony may be presented during the service. Depending on the structure of the prayer service, it may also be fitting to include several brief testimonies at different moments throughout the celebration, allowing those gathered to prayerfully reflect on the diverse experiences, sorrows, and aspirations of migrant communities.]

INTERMEDIATE HYMN: LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

[The choir sings “*Lift Every Voice and Sing*.” **Note:** Organizers are welcome to choose a different hymn/song.]

HOMILY/GUIDED REFLECTION

[The U.S. Bishops’ *Special Message on Immigration* and excerpts from Dr. King’s Speech “*I Have a Dream*,” have been included below as appendices to supplement the readings.

Note: Organizers may choose one of the appendices below for the homily or guided reflection. They are welcome to use other excerpts throughout the prayer service.]

CALL TO ACTION

[This is a sacred moment to prayerfully reflect on what we, as the Body of Christ, are called to do collectively within our local parishes, communities, state, and nation. Consider concrete and compassionate ways to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate migrants, immigrants, and refugees, while faithfully advocating for just and humane immigration reform that upholds the dignity of every human person created in the image of God.]

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Let us now observe a moment of silence in prayerful solidarity with the millions of migrants who, each day, risk their lives in search of a place of safety and belonging—whether to reunite with loved ones, to seek new opportunities, or to secure the means to support families who remain in their countries of origin.

[Moment of Silence]

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLES OF GOD

[Now we offer prayers for the people of God. Organizers can choose some of the prayers from each section, or use one of the sections in full, or another appropriate choice that reflects the needs of the community gathered.]

On Slavery

For Pope Leo XIV, that our Heavenly Father may gift him with deep wisdom as he calls the Church to struggle against the evil of human trafficking, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For all bishops in the Church, that they continue to be leaders in the fight against modern day slavery, both domestically and abroad, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For our priests and deacons, that they may proclaim boldly Church teaching on human dignity and the Church’s teaching on human trafficking, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For our religious brothers and sisters and all the lay faithful, that God inspire them with the continued commitment to fight the evil of human trafficking, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For everyone who is trapped in a situation of slavery, that God will liberate them from their chains, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For perpetrators of slavery, that they repent of their evil ways and turn to God for forgiveness, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

On Migrants

For all bishops in our Church, that they may be encouraged by our prayers and support to lead God's people in building a culture that respects the human dignity of all migrants, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For all Catholics, that God inspire them to take action in their local communities to support and protect migrants and to advocate on their behalf, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For unaccompanied migrant children, that God protect them on their journey and safely reunite them with their families, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For our neighbors, coworkers, friends, fellow Christians, and all people, that they may grow in their awareness of the issue of migration and become a voice in the public square calling for greater protections for these populations, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For migrant workers, that they may labor in safe and just conditions, and that we who benefit from their labor may be truly grateful for what they provide, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For migrants, refugees, and all other strangers in our midst, that they may find strength in our concern for justice and feel the warmth of our love, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

On Refugees

For the bishops, that they will continue in their commitment to advocate for refugees at home and abroad and provide in their communities a place of welcome, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For all refugees who are forced to flee from their homes, that God bring them peace and peace to their country of origin, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For refugees in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, and elsewhere who are experiencing great suffering, that God bring them to a place of peace and safety, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For refugee children, who have been separated by their family due to circumstance or death, that God provide his protection, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For an end to all strife and persecution that gives rise to refugee crises, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

On Government Officials

For the President of the United States and all government leaders: that they work tirelessly to end the bane of slavery that exists in our communities, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For the President of the United States and all government leaders: that the Son of God, who became human, will help them understand the great dignity of human persons, and support legislation that better protects vulnerable populations in our midst, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For policy makers in our nation, that God grant them the wisdom to enact laws that provide greater protection for all migrant populations, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

For policy makers in our nation, that they provide support to migrant populations who yearn for a new beginning, we pray to the Lord.

R: Lord, hear our prayer.

[**Note:** This prayer is available [on this USCCB webpage](#). The original version of this prayer was slightly modified for the purpose of creating this prayer service template for local adaptation.]

OUR FATHER

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
R: Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Prayer for Migrants

Good Lord and Heavenly Father,
You love each one of your children regardless of the lands they come from.

We thank you for helping us to recognize each other as members of the same human family and as your beloved people.

We thank you because you enlighten us, encourage us, and feed us with your Word.

We pray for those that suffer due to hunger, injustice, climate change, and poverty—so that together we may find solutions to change their lives.

We pray for our countries, so that we may find viable paths for international collaboration and authentic human development.

We pray for our Church, so that we may learn to be all brothers and sisters. Thus, we ask for a humble heart that is willing to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate those who knock at our doors.

We pray this in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is present in our brothers and sisters, who lives and reigns forever and ever.

R: Amen.

[**Note:** This prayer is available [on this USCCB webpage.](#)]

CLOSING HYMN: MANY GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT BY AL CARMINES

[The celebrant, ministers and the faithful leave in procession while the choir sings “*Many Gifts, One Spirit*” by Al Carmines. **Note:** The organizers are welcome to choose a different hymn/song.]

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APPENDIX ONE – U.S. BISHOPS’ SPECIAL PASTORAL MESSAGE ON IMMIGRATION

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. We are concerned about the conditions in detention centers and the lack of access to pastoral care. We lament that some immigrants in the United States have arbitrarily lost their legal status. We are troubled by threats against the sanctity of houses of worship and the special nature of hospitals and schools. We are grieved when we meet parents who fear being detained when taking their children to school and when we try to console family members who have already been separated from their loved ones.

Despite obstacles and prejudices, generations of immigrants have made enormous contributions to the well-being of our nation. We as Catholic bishops love our country and pray for its peace and prosperity. For this very reason, we feel compelled now in this environment to raise our voices in defense of their God-given human dignity.

Catholic teaching exhorts nations to recognize the fundamental dignity of all persons, including immigrants. We bishops advocate for a meaningful reform of our nation’s immigration laws and procedures. Human dignity and national security are not in conflict. Both are possible if people of good will work together.

We recognize that nations have a responsibility to regulate their borders and establish a just and orderly immigration system for the sake of the common good. Without such processes, immigrants face the risk of trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Safe and legal pathways serve as an antidote to such risks.

The Church’s teaching rests on the foundational concern for the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God (*Genesis 1:27*). As pastors, we look to Sacred Scripture and the example of the Lord Himself, where we find the wisdom of God’s compassion. The priority of the Lord, as the Prophets remind us, is for those who are most vulnerable: the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger (*Zechariah 7:10*). In the Lord Jesus, we see the One who became poor for our sake (*2 Corinthians 8:9*), we see the Good Samaritan who lifts us from the dust (*Luke 10:30–37*), and we see the One who is found in the least of these (*Matthew 25*). 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 (*John 13:34*).

To our immigrant brothers and sisters, we stand with you in your suffering, since, when one member suffers, all suffer (*cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26*). You are not alone!

We note with gratitude that so many of our clergy, consecrated religious, and lay faithful already accompany and assist immigrants in meeting their basic human needs. We urge all people of good will to continue and expand such efforts.

We oppose the indiscriminate mass deportation of people. We pray for an end to dehumanizing rhetoric and violence, whether directed at immigrants or at law enforcement. We pray that the Lord may guide the leaders of our nation, and we are grateful for past and present opportunities to dialogue with public and elected officials. In this dialogue, we will continue to advocate for meaningful immigration reform.

As disciples of the Lord, we remain men and women of hope, and hope does not disappoint! (cf. Romans 5:5)

May the mantle of Our Lady of Guadalupe enfold us all in her maternal and loving care and draw us ever closer to the heart of Christ.

APPENDIX TWO – “I HAVE A DREAM” BY DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. . . .

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, . . . one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. . . With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. . . .

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”