REMARKS FOR BISHOP BRENDAN CAHILL

Chairman, Committee on Migration

Fall Plenary Assembly - November 18, 2026

Thank you, Archbishop Coakley.

Brothers: Thirty years ago, for the occasion of the Church's 82nd World Migration Day, which we now commemorate as the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Saint John Paul II proclaimed: "In the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere."

This view is rooted in the instruction of Our Lord to spread the Gospel to all nations of the world, and its sentiment long precedes John Paul II's papacy. But it also recognizes a fundamental reality that has spanned the entirety of human existence: migration is a natural and unavoidable phenomenon.

From the dawn of creation to our present day, migration has been integral to the human story. To truly carry out the universal mission of the Church, our only option is to recognize and respond to the presence of Christ in every person, no matter where someone may be encountered along his or her earthly journey or what immigration status he or she may have.

In few places has this reality been as consequential as it has been in this country we love so dearly. As Archbishop Coakley noted in his message to the Holy Father, this is something we came together as a body to recognize one year ago through our special message. That extraordinary step represented both our unity as a Conference, as well as the unity we share with the Successor of Saint Peter, Pope Leo XIV. And it was also a reflection of the particular moment in the life of our country, as we continuously seek to read the signs of the times.

One year later, much of what we addressed at that time continues to be relevant today. Unfortunately, what Pope Francis described as a "culture of indifference" allows for much of what we see related to the treatment of immigrants, not only in this country but in others throughout our world as well.

In this context, there is much we could say about marginalizing people based on their country of origin, the language they speak, the color of their skin, or their economic and political influence. These distinctions are not new, nor do we believe that acknowledging such differences is inherently immoral. But much more problematically and sadly, they even have at times been vigorously employed by our own government through the spreading of fear, misinformation, and the rash generalizations of human beings, the vast majority of whom simply seek the means to live in peace and safety and desire the same for their families.

These manipulations of the truth, which dismiss God-given human dignity, can be seen in various aspects of the current immigration laws, policies, and practices, from the emphasis on mass detention and mass deportation to the sudden revocation of legal status and work authorization for millions of people. The deportation of people to countries totally unfamiliar to them without due consideration for domestic and international obligations is especially alarming.

The Committee on Migration has maintained a particular focus on the experiences of children and families. Since the start of 2025, over 200,000 children are believed to have been separated from a parent through detention or deportation. Almost two-thirds of these children are U.S. citizens. This trauma of family separation is also not new, but there is no denying its increase in light of the current approaches to immigration and our immigrant brothers and sisters.

Our Holy Father emphasized the plight of children in the context of migration when he chose the theme for this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees, which is also adopted annually as our theme for the U.S. Church's commemoration of National Migration Week. The reduced protections and support for noncitizen children, especially the decreased availability of legal services for this population, is a scandal, precisely when they are instrumental in safeguarding these children from abuse and exploitation.

Monitoring and responding to conditions in immigration detention remain priorities for the Migration Committee as well, with more people detained today than any other time in our nation's history. In this regard, I offer my thanks to Archbishop Sample, Archbishop Fabre, and Bishop Wack for joining with me in extending support and encouragement to the entire body when it comes to providing sacramental care and pastoral accompaniment to those in detention. Please know that our staff at the Conference are eager to assist with addressing any issues that arise for dioceses attempting to provide pastoral care to those in immigration detention.

We know, for so many, these realities can be overwhelming, including for those who work tirelessly to minister to families in need, such as those staffing our diocesan charities and parishes. As pastors in good conscience, we are compelled to raise our voices and question the morality of immigration enforcement strategies that undermine human dignity, standards of decency, and the common good, as we did together last year when opposing indiscriminate mass deportation. To that end, I am deeply grateful to you, brothers, for your continued and steadfast witness in your own dioceses as events unfold locally. Similarly, I recognize the vital work so often being done by you and your staff to cultivate productive relationships with state and local officials, law enforcement, and other stakeholders.

Without dismissing the difficult human realities faced today, our faith reminds us to be people of hope. And as St. Paul so often reassures us, together with Our Lady, we are never beyond the reach of God's love. This is the guiding light of the Conference's You Are Not Alone initiative, launched in conjunction with last year's special message, to support, encourage, and promote local accompaniment efforts of families in need.

Brothers, it has been so inspiring for me to see our dioceses and parishes, under your pastoral leadership, respond to the evolving spiritual and temporal needs of our immigrant brothers and sisters over these past two years. I also appreciate the way so many of you have embraced the Migration Committee's suggestion of instituting diocesan task forces on immigration, which are meant to support the good work already being done at the local level through existing structures, not to duplicate or replace them. The Secretariat of Migration continues to find ways to share best practices such as these and create opportunities for dioceses to learn from one another.

One other specific area where we continue to see challenges—but where we have also been very grateful to achieve meaningful relief—is the Religious Worker Visa Program. The regulatory change made by the government at the start of the year, which the Conference had been advocating for several years to achieve, is the most noteworthy of the positive developments. In particular, I would like to thank you, Archbishop Coakley, for your efforts to achieve this.

Supporting passage of the Religious Workforce Protection Act remains very important for reducing disruptions to the Church's ministries in the United States, given how impactful the contributions of foreign-born priests, religious, and others are to the life of the Church. This is yet another area where our staff continue to work extensively to address issues where they arise and engage frequently with both the Administration and Congress.

Taking all of this, and considering the desires of the American people, the question of meaningful reforms to our immigration system should not be discussed in terms of "if" but "when". We know neither the day nor the hour, but the Migration Committee is working closely with our staff at the Conference and our partners to remain vigilant and engaged. We also underscored this need for reform a year ago in our special message. That, as you know, was by no means the first time, and we have not stopped calling for it in the time since.

The Justice for Immigrants campaign, through the participation of national partners, dioceses, and faithful individuals across the country, remains the U.S. Church's primary vehicle for supporting meaningful reform. Much has been done in recent years to ensure each diocese has at least one JFI point of contact to aid in the mutual exchange of information. If your diocese does not have one, there is no time like the present moment to change that.

On this issue of reform, it has been rewarding and encouraging for me to collaborate with our evangelical brothers and sisters through our Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue on Immigration, in which I am grateful to be joined by several of our brothers. Last month, I gladly joined with the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, with whom I co-chair the Dialogue, in publishing an ecumenical statement on the need for Christian compassion and wisdom in the immigration debate. Drawing from the foundation of Scripture, we spoke clearly of the current offenses against human life and dignity and the brokenness of our present immigration system.

But we spoke also of a better way forward. And we laid out several points that reflect our shared understandings and aspirations as Catholic and evangelical Americans. This includes our sincere belief that governments have a right and responsibility to protect their citizens and provide for the common good through, among other things, regulating international borders in a safe and orderly way.

We have always endeavored—and will continue striving—to work with civil leaders and all people of good faith, regardless of political orientation, to further the common good, including in this complex area of immigration. I hope the ecumenical statement serves as a helpful resource for you and our people as we labor to express support for a more just, humane, and Gospel-inspired approach to immigration.

In beginning my remarks today, brothers, I invoked John Paul II's evergreen words. I would now like to conclude by reflecting briefly on the life and ministry of another missionary saint, one who would have been classified today under our law as a "foreign-born religious worker": Frances Xavier Cabrini, affectionately and simply known to so many as Mother Cabrini.

In June of this year, our Holy Father commemorated the 80th anniversary of Mother Cabrini's canonization. From the region in Italy where Mother Cabrini was born, while venerating a relic of her heart, our Holy Father quoted her own words, saying: "No task will be too difficult, no land too far away, no person too wounded for the love of the heart of Jesus and for all those called to be bearers of Christ's love in the world."

Our first pope to hail from this land, paying tribute to our first American citizen to be declared a saint, who is also the Church's patroness of immigrants, speaking in her birthplace of Italy: this is an extraordinary time to be Catholic Americans, dear brothers.

On that occasion, our Holy Father encouraged young people in particular to get to know Mother Cabrini through her writings, letters, and travel journals—to be inspired by her missionary zeal. "She was immersed in the love of the heart of Christ," he said, "and this gave her an extraordinary capacity for work and strength of spirit."

That is the same strength of spirit we aspire to today and in all times for ourselves and our people: to serve the vulnerable migrant or refugee, the brother or sister in our midst, to be the love of Christ in a world so desperately yearning for it. And as Mother Cabrini consecrated her life's work to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so, too, have we consecrated our country to His most Sacred Heart.

The Secretariat of Migration has continued to promote The Cabrini Pledge as both a reminder of our immigrant heritage and a call to deeper engagement with our faith in response to current events. I invite you and your dioceses to continue to use and share this resource as a way to increase understanding of the Church's teaching in this area, encourage reflection on the role of immigration in our country's past, present, and future, and inspire missionary disciples for a time such as this.

In a few moments, we will conclude our time together this afternoon by jointly reciting the Collect for Mother Cabrini's feast day. As we pray and move forward together, may Mother Cabrini continue to inspire us and be a reminder to us that no task is too difficult, so long as our purpose remains the Lord's.

Thank you.