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To: The Media of New Mexico and Far West Texas
From: The Rt. Rev. Michael L. Vono
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of the Rio Grande
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Contact: The Rev. Canon Raymond Raney
Rraney@dioceserg.org
505.881.0636 (O) 505.934.6213 (c)

**STATEMENT ON THE FORCIBLE SEPARATION
OF FAMILIES AT OUR SOUTHERN BORDER
BY THE BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF THE RIO GRANDE**

The crisis along the U.S.-Mexico border tearing families apart must be called what it is – sinful. To stand idly by while weeping children beg for their parents, is immoral. To forcibly deport parents while their children remain in U.S. custody is immoral. To cynically use vulnerable children, dislocated and frightened, lacking in language skills and without the nurturing protection of parents, as pawns in political power plays, is immoral.

All these actions deserve condemnation in the strongest possible terms – they are not merely reprehensible in their action and their consequence, they are diabolical.

Surely as a nation we are better than this! Surely as Christians we are called by our Baptismal Covenant, individually and collectively, to take a stand against this insult to all that is good and decent and humane.

The impact of the political decisions affecting those fleeing violence from south of our border is especially true for us in the Diocese of the Rio Grande. The Tornillo tent complex for children lies within our Diocese, as does Ft. Bliss, where it is likely that immigrant children also will be housed. More than almost any other Episcopal diocese, we are brought face to face with this moral, spiritual and political evil. More than almost any other diocese, we need to come to terms with our moral responsibility in this crisis.

Throughout history, the Church has considered the protection of the vulnerable one of the most sacred obligation of Christians. This tradition begins with the Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures, where this moral imperative is made clear over and over again (cf. Leviticus. 19.34, Deuteronomy 10.18-19, among other texts). The motivation for this obligation is made clear: “And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.”

The New Testament continues and reinforces this tradition. In Matthew 25.25-36, we are reminded how we will be judged on the basis of our treatment of the least among us. This ought not to surprise us, since we follow a Messiah who himself, as a helpless child, was forced to flee to Egypt as a political refugee to escape Herod’s bloody oppression (Matthew 2.13-15).

While our care for the most vulnerable among us is mandated in Scripture, it is rooted in a more

fundamental idea. As Genesis unequivocally states, humankind, without distinction, is created in the image and likeness of God. Because each person bears the image of the living God, Christians are obligated to treat others, without exception, as if that stranger, that refugee, that child, were God. The Letter to the Hebrews (13.2) reminds us, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."

The separation of families at our southern border clearly is a violation of numerous international human rights agreements, especially the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. More importantly for us as Christians, it also is a violation of the basic principles of our faith that, beginning with Jesus, has sought to cherish and protect those least able to do so for themselves.

Let's reflect on our own experience. How many of us come from families in which immigration is part of our recent history! How many of our grandparents and great grandparents "were foreigners in Egypt!" Surely that obliges us, in as real a way as it did ancient Israel, "to love those who are foreigners."

Thoughtful policy makers across the political spectrum agree that comprehensive immigration reform is necessary—as it has been for at least the past 25 years.

On Fathers' Day, we prayed for God to help us, so that "we may proclaim your truth with boldness and minister your justice with compassion. . . ." Now is the time to put that prayer into action, individually and as a diocese. We must again take to heart the words emblazoned within the Statue of Liberty that has beckoned so many:

*"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!"*