Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia

A Corporate Stand in Solidarity with Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers Supporting Documentation

Criteria Checklist

- ✔ An issue external to the Congregation
- ✔ An issue of basic human rights, global concern or structural injustice
- ✔ An issue related to gospel values, Catholic Social Teaching and SSJ Constitutions
- ✔ An issue that addresses public policy or calls for public response

Research

Please include direct quotes and biblical references.

Scripture: References from the New American Bible

- "When an alien resides with you in your land do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for them as for yourself' for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God." Lev 19:33,34
- "The angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph with the command: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee into Egypt." Matt 2:13
- "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me." Matt 25:35
- "This is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you." John 15:12
- "Do not neglect to show hospitality, for by that means some have entertained angels without knowing it." Hebrews 13:2

Church Documents

- *Pope Leo XIII, Rerum Novarum (1891)*
  - "… when there is question of defending the rights of individuals, the poor and badly off have a claim to especial consideration. (#37)
  - "… no one would exchange his country for a foreign land if his own afforded him the means of a decent life." (#47)

- *Pope Pius XII, Exsul Familia Nazarethana (1952)*
    - "The migrant Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, living in exile in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien, and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil.

- *Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Terris (1963)*
    - "Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own state. When there are just reasons for it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership to the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of [humanity]. (#25)
    - "… as far as the common good rightly understood permits, it is the duty of that state to accept such immigrants and to help them to integrate them into itself as new members." (#106)

- *Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes, (1965)*
    - "In our times, a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception, and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign laborer unjustly looked down upon, a refugee … or a hungry person who disturbs our conscience by recalling the voice of the Lord, 'As long as you did it for one of these the least of my brethren, you did it for me." (Matthew 25:40) (#47)

- *Pope Paul VI, Populorum Progressio (1967)*
    - We cannot insist too much on the duty of giving foreigners a hospitable reception. It is a duty imposed by human solidarity and by Christian charity, and it is incumbent upon families and educational institutions in the host nations … they should be welcomed in the spirit of brotherly [and sisterly] love." "Emigrant workers should also be given a warm welcome. Their living conditions are often inhumane, and they must scrimp on their earnings in order to send help to their families who have remained behind in their native land in poverty."

- *Pope Paul VI, Octogesima Adveniens (1971)*
    - "Right to emigrate: We are thinking of the precarious situation of a great number of emigrant workers whose condition as foreigners makes it all the more difficult for them to make any sort of social vindication, in spite of their real participation in the economic effort of the country that receives them. It is urgently necessary for people to go beyond a narrowly nationalist attitude in their regard and to give them a charter which will assure them a right to emigrate, favor their integration, facilitate their professional advancement and give them access to decent housing where, if such is the case, their families can join them."

- *Synod of Bishops, Justicia in Mundo (1971)*
    - Calling attention to the structural roots of injustice afflicting people, the Bishops declare that action in the pursuit of justice and participation in the transformation of the world are constitutive elements in the Church's mission of preaching the Gospel. "Take, for example, the case of migrants." They are often forced to leave their own country to find work, but frequently find the doors closed in their faces because of discriminatory attitudes, or, if they can enter, they are often obligated to lead an insecure life or are treated in an inhumane manner."

    - "To be especially lamented is the condition of so many millions of refugees, and of every group or people suffering persecution—sometimes in institutionalized form—for racial or ethnic origin or on tribal grounds. This persecution on tribal grounds can at times take on the characteristics of genocide." (#21-22)

- *Pope John Paul II, Laborem Exercens (1981)*
    - "Every possible effort should be made to ensure that it may bring benefit to the emigrant's personal, family, and social life, both for the country to which he goes and the country which he leaves. In this area, much depends on just legislation, in particular with the rights of workers."

- *Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae (1995)*
    - "We cannot but think of today's tendency for people to refuse to accept responsibility for their brothers and sisters. Symptoms of this trend include: the lack of solidarity towards society's weakest members—such as the elderly, the infirm, immigrants, children—and the indifference frequently found in relations between the world's people even when basic values such as survival, freedom and peace are involved." (#8)

- *Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate (2009)*
    - "No country can be expected to address today's problems of migration by itself. We are all witnesses of the burden of suffering, the dislocation and the aspirations that accompany the flow of migrants. The phenomenon, as everyone knows, is difficult to manage; but there is no doubt that foreign workers, despite any difficulties concerning integration, make a significant contribution to the economic development of the host country through their labor, besides that which they make to their country of origin through the money they send home. Obviously, these laborers cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere workforce. They must not, therefore, be treated like any other factor of production. Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance." (#62)

- *Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium (2013)*
    - "I have always been distressed at the lot of those who are victims of human trafficking. How I wish that all of us would hear God's cry: "Where is your brother? (Gen 4:9) Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labor? Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood on their hands as a result of their comfort and silent complicity." (#211)

- *Pope Francis, Laudato Si': Care for Our Common Home (2015)*
    - "Climate Change is a Global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for distribution of goods. ...Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry. They have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change or to face natural disasters, and their access to social services and protection is very limited. For example, changes in climate, to which animals and plants cannot adapt, lead them to migrate; this in turn affects the livelihood of the poor, who are then forced to leave their homes, with great uncertainty of their future and their children. There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind, without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever. "#25

- *Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia (2016)*
    - "Human mobility, which corresponds to the natural historical movement of people, can prove to be a genuine enrichment for families that migrate and countries that welcome them. Furthermore, forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty, and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes of a journey that often puts lives at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families. In accompanying migrants, the Church needs a specific pastoral program addressed not only to families that migrate but also to those family members who remain behind." (#46)

- *Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, or Brothers and Sisters All (2020)*
    - "Complex challenges arise when our neighbor happens to be an immigrant. Ideally, unnecessary migration ought to be avoided; this entails creating in countries of origin the conditions needed for a dignified life and integral development. Yet until substantial progress is made in achieving this goal, we are obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfillment. Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate." (#129)

    - "This implies taking certain indispensable steps, especially in response to those who are fleeing grave humanitarian crises. As example, we may cite: increasing the simplifying of the granting of visas; adopting programs of individuals and community sponsorship; opening humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable refugees; providing suitable and dignified housing; guaranteeing personal security and access to basic services; ensuring adequate consular assistance and the right to retain personal identity documents; equitable access to the justice system; the possibility of opening bank accounts and the guarantee of the minimum needed to survive; freedom of movement and the possibility of employment; protecting minors and ensuring their regular access to education; providing for programs of temporary guardianship or shelter; guaranteeing religious freedom; promoting integration into society; supporting the reuniting of families; and preparing local communities for the process of integration." (#130)

- “The arrival of those who are different coming from other ways of life and cultures, can be a gift, for the ‘stories of migrants are always stories of an encounter between individuals and cultures. For the communities and societies to which they come, migrants bring an opportunity for enrichment and the integral human development of every other human being.” (#133)

- *Pope Leo XIV, Dilexi Te (2025)*
  - “Where the world sees threats, she (the Church) sees children; where walls are built, she builds bridges. She knows that her proclamation of the Gospel is credible only when it is translated into gestures of closeness and welcome. And she knows that in every rejected migrant, it is Christ himself who knocks at the door of the community.” (#75)

  - “There is no shortage of theories attempting to justify the present state of affairs or to explain that economic thinking requires us to wait for invisible market forces to resolve everything. Nevertheless, the dignity of every human person must be respected today, not tomorrow, and the extreme poverty of all those to whom this dignity is denied should constantly weigh upon our conscience.” (#92)

- *U.S. Bishops Pastoral Statement, Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity (2000*)
  - “The Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into this country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of all, especially those who find themselves in desperate circumstances.”

  - “As Catholics, we are called to take concrete measures to overcome the misunderstanding, ignorance, competition, and fear that stand in the way of genuinely welcoming the stranger in our midst and enjoying the communion that is our destiny as children of God.”

- *2025 USCCB Special Pastoral Message on Immigration*
  - “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 goodwill 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.

Congregational Documents

Constitutions

- With the help of God's grace and in fidelity to our founder's expressed wish, we live and work lovingly among all persons with a special preference for those who are poor, which calls us wherever we are to be in union with them. (#18)

- The call of the gospel impels us to commit ourselves to alleviate, as far as we are able, the suffering of those in need and to share our resources with them. (#76)

- To be in union with persons who are poor means to support those who are materially and socially poor. Those who are socially poor include refugees, prisoners, unemployed persons, sick and elderly persons, and others who suffer from discrimination in society. (#21.1)

Chapter 2019

- Attentive to the urgent needs of Earth and the global community we will: Engage with courage and vigilance in personal and public advocacy for systemic change.

Chapter 2024

- We commit to be a healing presence, advocating with and responding to persons experiencing marginalization and addressing human activity and systemic injustices responsible for the abuse of Earth and the miseries of our day.

Signs of the times

Some significant situations in our country and in our world cry out for our attention and response:

- Recent months have seen both the forced removal and imprisonment of migrants and refugees without due process (New York Times, April-May 2025).

- We have witnessed military intimidation of our sisters, brothers and siblings in workplaces and in their own homes (ABC News—Los Angeles, Chicago).

- Children reported to have been neglected and abused while in ICE custody at hundreds of detention centers in dozens of states (Senate Probe led by Senator Jon Ossoff, August 5, 2025)

- Legal immigration status is being taken from and denied for those already in the process for parole and temporary protected status (Supreme Court revoked protective status of 350,000 Venezuelan immigrants), all while Congress and the current administration fail to work on a comprehensive and just reform of the immigration system (the last bipartisan bill to pass in Congress was in 1996).

- Refugees and immigrants in other countries have experienced the withdrawal of humanitarian assistance and even aid intended to mitigate forced immigration (USAID dissolved 7/1/25, $1.2 billion rescinded from funds for Global Health).

Other groups we consider allies:

- Catholic Legal Immigration Network
- Catholic Charities USA
- Catholic Relief Services
- Jesuit Refugee Services
- Leadership Conference of Women Religious
- NETWORK, Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, Advocates for Catholic Social Justice
- One Church, One Family Catholic Public Witness for Immigrants
- Pope Francis, Pope Leo XIV – Papal Office
- Southern Poverty Law Center
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops/ Justice for Immigrants
- United States Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph

Rationale/History/Background

Why take this corporate stand?
We recognize in every immigrant and refugee the image of God. When they experience exclusion and discrimination or are detained, separated from their families, or deported without due process, we see a violation not only of human rights but of Gospel values.

We take this corporate stand to:

- Witness publicly to our belief in the sacredness of every human life.
- Challenge the unjust systems and structures that criminalize migration.
- Encourage education, advocacy, and accompaniment among our sisters, associates and partners in mission.
- Align our communal voice and resources with the Gospel imperative to welcome the stranger.

Who will benefit?
Immigration is a worldwide issue. Therefore, it is our primary desire that the entire human community benefits from this corporate stand. We believe that when unjust systems are transformed, all people experience greater freedom and security.

Additionally, we hope that by raising our collective voice we will strengthen our partnership with all who labor for a more compassionate world and challenge the unjust systems that globally promulgate fear and prejudice against those who must leave their homeland to find a better life.

We hope that through this corporate stand that we can be witnesses to our charism of unioning love which calls us to be one with God and with one another. This includes the call to teach and model our deep belief that we are all one in God's loving gaze.

We believe, as well, that this corporate stand will benefit our Congregation because every act of solidarity renews our fidelity to the Gospel and strengthens the bonds of unity among us.

Finally, we hope that by our affirmation of their humanity and their rights to safety, freedom and dignity, the immigrants and refugees, themselves, will experience support and strength by our corporate action.

To Whom/What will it witness?

- This corporate stand bears witness first and foremost to God's inclusive love-a love that knows no borders and calls all creation into unity. It also witnesses to:
- our immigrant and refugee sisters and brothers, affirming their inherent dignity.
- our Church and world, proclaiming that faith compels us to act justly.
- our own Congregation and Associates in Mission reminding us of who we are and the life we are called to live.
- future generations, testifying that we chose unity, mercy and hope instead of division and fear.

What will be gained?
In taking this corporate stand, we gain deeper fidelity to our mission and to the Gospel we profess. We gain spiritual integrity, communal strength, greater compassion, courage and hope, as we stand publicly for love and justice.

How does this proposal reflect our SSJ history and present lived experience?

From our founding in 17th-century France, the Sisters of Saint Joseph have sought to respond to the needs of the times with courage, creativity and compassion. Our earliest Sisters went out into their neighborhoods to serve God and the dear neighbor without distinction—especially those who were poor, sick, marginalized or forgotten. They crossed boundaries of class and culture, embodying a spirituality of love and unity.

In every generation, that same spirit has guided the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Our history is a continuous story of courageous women who saw the suffering of their time and responded in love.

Today, we recognize that the plight of immigrants and refugees is one of the defining moral challenges of our age. Families are torn apart, human dignity is denied, and fear of the "other" continues to divide communities. In the midst of this reality, we hear again the Gospel invitation and our founders' call to become instruments of unioning love with God and with one another.

Implementation and Action for Standing with Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The following actions may flow from the Corporate Stand. There are different ways by which each sister may participate. Each sister/ local community may choose the most appropriate action(s).

Prayer and Fasting

- Consider a day of prayer and fasting each month, for example the 12th as a reminder of Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- Accompany migrants occasionally at the weekend liturgy. There is no need to speak another language. Parishes with a migrant community usually have bilingual missalettes.
- Advocate for a general intercession for migrants and refugees or for immigration reform at congregational liturgies and in parishes of residence or ministry.

Participation in Groups which work for Immigrant Justice

- Justice for Immigrants (JFI)
- Migration and Refugee Services (MRS)

- NETWORK Catholic Social Justice Lobby
- Additional support groups as mentioned in this document (as on page 8) as well as state, diocesan and local groups.

Advocacy and Accompaniment

- Put your state and federal legislators' numbers on your phone and call them regularly about immigration issues. Encourage friends and family to do the same.
- Be an internet advocate contacting legislators for Comprehensive and Compassionate Immigration Reform.
- Participate in prayer vigils, protests, boycotts, and other non-violent public forums which promote Immigrant Justice.
- Support through prayer and/or volunteer hours our newest sponsored ministries: Welcome Center, Neighborhood Center, SSJ Newcomer Housing Alliance.

Education

- Self-Assessment tool to measure own bias.
- Engage in on-going personal education about root causes of migration.
- Use the Iowa Bishops' Pastoral Reflection on Immigration with its two-session guide to engage small groups in a growing awareness.
- Encourage JPIC Office to schedule yearly gatherings related to immigration awareness.
- Read, reflect and make the Cabrini Pledge *The Cabrini Pledge: An Invitation to be Keepers of Hope*
- Groody, Daniel. *A Theology of Migration: The Bodies of Refugees and the Body of Christ*, foreword by Pope Francis, Orbis Books, 2022. Also, consider a book club with this or other readings.

Affirm and Support Leadership as they continue to speak out in support of immigration issues.

Possible Implications/Consequences

Internal: What effect will it have on us if we take a Corporate Stand?
Taking this corporate stand will call us to deeper conversion—as individuals and as a congregation.

- Spiritually, this stand will deepen our prayer and our solidarity with those who suffer.
- Communally, this stand will strengthen our identity and renew our sense of shared mission.
- Ministerially, it will challenge us to integrate justice into all our works—in education, health care, parish life and social service.
- Personally, this stand will ask each of us to grow in awareness, humility and courage.
- In taking this corporate stand, we will be changed. We will grow in fidelity to our charism, in compassion for our world and in hope for the future. We will become more clearly who we are meant to be women and men of unity, moved by the Spirit, loving God and the dear neighbor without distinction.

External: What effect will it have on us if we do not take a Corporate Stand?
If we do not take a corporate stand, we diminish the public witness of who we are called to be as Sisters of Saint Joseph—women whose mission is to bring all into unity with God and one another. We miss the opportunity for spiritual growth that comes when faith is tested and expressed in

courageous action. Our unity could weaken, and our charism—rooted in the call to love the "dear neighbor" without distinction—could fade in its prophetic power.

- To the world, our silence could be misread as indifference. Without a public stand we fail to offer the courage, hope and moral leadership which the People of God long to hear.
- To those who suffer, our lack of a stand could feel like abandonment. Immigrants and refugees who face fear, exclusion and loss may not know that they have allies in faith standing beside them. Our silence could deepen their sense of isolation and despair.
- To our Associates and Partners in mission, failing to act together without a clear statement could weaken our collective commitment to justice and inclusion.
- To be silent in this moment is a denial of part of our identity. If we are seized by fear, not love, our lives and our voices fail to be authentic.