

Joint migrant letter signed

Patricia Zapor/CNS

WASHINGTON — With current migration policies essentially creating a new underclass in the United States, the time has come for the governments of Mexico and the United States to make basic changes in immigration law and practice, say the Catholic bishops of the two countries in a new joint letter.

The bishops of the United States and Mexico jointly challenged their governments to change immigration policies and promised to do more themselves to educate Catholics and political leaders about the social justice issues involved in migration and to address migrants' needs.

"Many who seek to migrate suffer inhuman conditions, and in too many cases, die tragically trying to get here," said Miami Auxiliary Bishop Thomas G. Wenski at a Washington press conference Jan. 24 where the document was released.

Bishop Wenski, who heads the Committee on Migration of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the U.S. immigration system is broken and must be reformed. Attitudes toward immigration and how social institutions, including the church, respond to migrants also must be addressed, he said.

"Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope," the first joint pastoral letter of the two national bishops' conferences, was released Jan. 23 in Mexico City and Jan. 24 in Washington.

The two bishops' conferences approved the statement at their plenary meetings in November. Its publication was held up until minor differences in the wording of the text could be sorted out by the bishops' respective migration committees. The release dates closely coincide with the anniversary of Pope John Paul II's 1999 apostolic exhortation, "Ecclesia in America," which calls on the church to consider the Americas as one continent in addressing issues such as evangelization.

The 50-page letter says both governments must change policies, making it easier to legally immigrate to the United States, better protecting the civil rights of migrants in both countries and addressing the root causes of migration — poverty and lack of employment options in Mexico and Central America.

The letter urges both governments to "abandon the type of (law enforcement) strategies that give rise to smuggling operations and migrant deaths" and to restore due process rights. It encourages a broad legalization program for the millions of people who are in the United States illegally. Such a program would benefit both countries, it said, by stabilizing the labor market in the United States, improving the standard of living in immigrant communities and smoothing the flow of remittances and travelers between the two countries.

Bishop Wenski said a legalization program also would help address security concerns that have heightened since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks by allowing people to feel they no longer must hide lest they be deported. People in immigrant communities often hesitate to report crimes or become involved in their children's schools for fear of attracting attention to their own illegal status, he said.

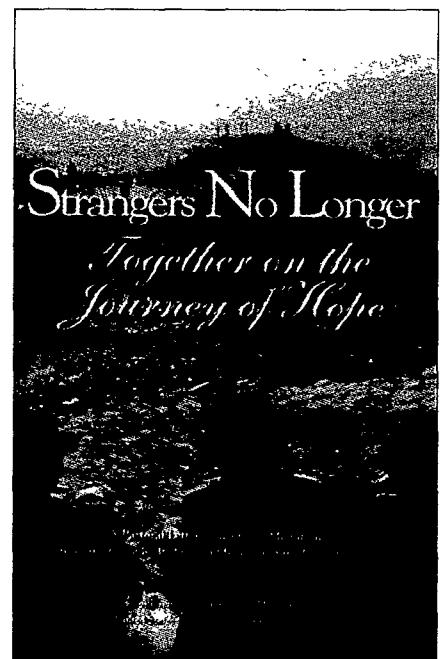
The increased militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border in the last decade, which has led to thousands of deaths of people crossing the border and has cost millions of dollars, could be eased if people have more legitimate ways of entering the United States to find work, he said.

In many ways, Bishop Wenski said, the current situation in the United States is essentially creating a new underclass of immigrants.

"By keeping millions of undocumented people without documents they are only exploited," he said, adding that such migrants lack the same civil and legal rights as legal immigrants and are held back by a glass ceiling from improving their lives.

"The last time we created an underclass like that we called it Jim Crow," Bishop Wenski said. "We still haven't gotten over the consequences of that."

The two nations are interdependent in many ways, the letter notes. About 800,000 Mexicans enter the United States each day to work, vis-



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The bishops' conferences of Mexico and the United States have issued the pastoral "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope."

it relatives or shop. Bishop Wenski said Mexicans send about \$10 billion worth of wages back to relatives in Mexico each year, a significant portion of the nation's income.

Bishop Wenski said perhaps the most challenging part of implementing the letter lies in persuading Congress and the administration to make the sought-after changes in U.S. law and policy.

No funding has been set aside by the U.S. bishops to implement the recommendations, he added, but "there's always a way to stretch a little and find ways to cover things."

AQ receives first installment of Wegman gift

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Aquinas Institute has received the first installment of a pledged \$10 million gift from grocery-store magnate Robert B. Wegman, three months after Wegman postponed the donation until his alma mater could settle friction between faculty and administration.

In a related development, the school has moved closer to settling a lawsuit filed by the school's former president, Patrick Hanley, who left Aquinas amid controversy in October.

Aquinas received a donation of \$1 million from Wegman around Christmas, said Michael R. Daley, the school's acting president. The money will go toward a new fine arts center for the school, which is still in the planning stages.

Wegman, a member of Aquinas'

class of 1937, had announced the \$10 million gift in May. However, he delayed his initial payment due to tensions related to a vote among full-time Aquinas faculty and department chairs on formation of a faculty union.

Although the unionization move, which was put to a vote Nov. 14, was defeated 32 to 29, Daley said the school's administration has made a concerted effort since that time to improve relations with teachers. He noted that for the first time, a faculty member has been added to the school's board of trustees. That person is Theodore N. Mancini, a 10th-year Aquinas faculty member who teaches mass media and is also director of the school's drama department.

Daley added that other faculty members will soon be appointed to board committees in such areas as

human resources, finance, and buildings and grounds.

"The faculty did not have representation on the board; they have that now. They did not have representation on board committees; they have that now. There's a more positive atmosphere here," Daley said. "We continue to make progress, and (Wegman) has stated he will continue to support the school as long as we continue to make progress."

Daley said that the long-term agreement regarding the Wegman gift remains intact. The payments are to be spread out "over the course of a few years," although Daley said a more precise time line has never been established. The money is to be split equally between the fine arts center and an endowment fund.

Aquinas also appeared to be progressing last week toward a settlement with Hanley, who filed a law-

suit against the school last November in state Supreme Court. Daley said Jan. 27 that both Aquinas and Hanley "have agreed on all the points of the settlement," and that the settlement could be reached "any time now."

Mark Moretti, an attorney representing Hanley, declined comment, saying the settlement has not been finalized and that he is under a gag order by the court.

Daley declined further comment on the lawsuit. However, in a statement issued shortly after Hanley left the school, Daley had said that Hanley's complaint "reveals gross factual inaccuracies that the Institute expects to address aggressively."

Hanley's lawsuit contended that he was fired unjustly by the school and was made "a scapegoat" for the unionization effort and Wegman's threat to withhold his \$10 million gift.

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