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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bishops' Statement on Immigration

As bishops charged with responsibility for over 500 parishes across our region, we write to share our deep concern about the current debate over immigration in the United States. As we observe the unfolding situation along our country's border with Mexico we are troubled that this debate seems to be driven more by rancor and political partisanship than by the deep moral and spiritual dimensions of the issue at hand.

Our communities of faith share three foundational principles regarding the issue of immigration:

First, we assume that people have the right to migrate in order to sustain their lives and the lives of their families. This assumption is based on the ancient biblical teaching that the goods of the earth belong to our Creator who intends them to be shared with all people. While defending the right to private property, our churches teach that individuals do not have the right to use private property without regard for the common good.

Second, we assume that a country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration. While people have the right to migrate, no country has the duty to receive so many immigrants that its social and economic life are jeopardized. The vast majority of our parishes were established by immigrants to America. So we realize that most persons migrate--not simply to enhance their standard of living--but to embrace safety, freedom, and opportunities that don't exist in their countries of origin. Our immigrant heritage has also contributed to our churches' strong commitment to assisting immigrants and refugees.

Third, we assume that a country must regulate its borders with *both* justice and mercy, *both* fairness and generosity. This third principle supplies the proper context for understanding the first two principles. It is only in the interplay of pursuing both fairness and generosity that the best discussion of immigration will take place.

It is precisely such *discussion* of immigration that is so sorely needed in our nation at this time. So we urge members of our parishes along with all our neighbors to embrace the gift of respectful conversation as we sort out this perplexing, critical issue of immigration. In that spirit we invite you to consider the following possibilities:

- Re-commit ourselves to fact-based reasoning, a free press, and free speech;
- Insist upon civility in our public discourse—starting with ourselves;

- Resist the urge to do all our “talking” via social media;
- Sit down regularly with persons who hold opinions other than our own and listen more than we speak;
- Urge our members of Congress, Senators and the President to pursue comprehensive immigration reform that is both compassionate and just;
- Invite others to join us in pondering what it means to balance care for ourselves with care for the common good; and
- Avail ourselves of the resources of our faith communities--principally the gift of prayer.

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son. Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred that infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and through our struggle and confusion, work to accomplish your purposes on earth; so that, in your good time, every people and nation may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Bishop Terry Brandt, Eastern North Dakota Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Michael Hoepfner, Roman Catholic Diocese of Crookston

Bishop Lawrence Wohlrabe, Northwestern Minnesota Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Note: this statement draws upon *Catholic Social Teaching On Immigration and the Movement of Peoples* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)¹ and *A Message on Immigration* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).²

¹ <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/catholic-teaching-on-immigration-and-the-movement-of-peoples.cfm>

²

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ImmigrationSM.pdf?_ga=2.7800370.1268351297.1529811555-2130564817.1526953250