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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As the Catholic Bishops of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City and of the Diocese of Tulsa, our thoughts and prayers are with all of our elected state senators and representatives as they debate many bills which have not only political and economic, but also moral dimensions. We are grateful for legislative support of measures to protect unborn children and to promote the protection of marriage as a foundational institution in our society. The pending legislation regulating immigration also has a moral dimension.

Immigration reform is primarily the responsibility of our federal officials. That being said, any reform measures at the state level ought to begin with a commitment to respect the fundamental dignity of every human person, not merely citizens or those who are in our country and state with the proper documentation. We are concerned also that these immigration bills will have the intentional or unintentional effect of instilling fear in an already vulnerable population.

We would like to begin by saying that Catholic social teaching makes it very clear that, "Respect for the human person dictates that "everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as 'another self.'" No legislation can undo the reality that every human being is our brother and "The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Christ said "when I was hungry you fed me." That is a dictate that cannot be ignored, or in any way mitigated by human law.

While the Catholic Church recognizes the right of Governments to protect their sovereign borders, it also recognizes the principle of solidarity and that we are all persons created by God. We steadfastly believe that, since everyone is created by God, human dignity and human rights are not commodities to be allocated according to nationality.

The struggle for just immigration laws is complex but necessary. It is our prayer that Congress will enact comprehensive, fair and equitable immigration reform, which will (1) acknowledge our dependence on undocumented workers, (2) provide a living wage and decent working conditions and (3) offer a path to legal status which will bring these undocumented persons out of the shadows, where they are so easily preyed upon by human traffickers and other unscrupulous profiteers. We pray that the decisions of our elected state officials will be guided by a search for the common good of all and not on narrow economic or political interests which fail to protect and promote human dignity, family unity and children.

In short, we want to reiterate that the Catholic Church will always obey the command of Christ who tells us "when I was hungry you fed me" because in the poor we see the face of Christ Himself. We will continue to do this for all of the poor regardless of race, status, religion or creed. We pray that our legislators will both remember and apply this same command in all of its deliberations and debates.

Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
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Most Reverend Edward J. Slattery
Bishop of Tulsa