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STATEMENT

**Archbishop John C. Wester on the
Executive Orders Relating to Immigrants and Refugees**

ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Friday, February 3, 2017— IMMEDIATE RELEASE— Archbishop John C. Wester’s Statement on the Executive Orders Relating to Immigrants and Refugees

In light of recent Executive Actions by President Trump, I am deeply concerned for many of our people in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and beyond who feel afraid and isolated. Indeed, during these unsettled times, there are quite a few of us who can easily give into the feeling that we are not safe and that we are in imminent danger from terrorists and other extremists. As a pastor, I believe that it is important to recognize and distinguish between real threats that should concern us and unreal threats that provoke fear because of rhetoric designed to play upon our anxieties as a society. Jesus offers us an alternative: to act out of love and not out of fear.

It seems to me that the recent Executive Actions imply that we should be afraid of those coming to the United States, even though we have a rich history of welcoming those who have made our country great over the last two centuries. The truth is that our country has not experienced an act of foreign terrorism since the 9/11 attacks, due in no small part to the rigorous, lengthy and effective security measures put in place for screening and vetting individuals and families fleeing violence and persecution. We must not believe the narrative that we are in danger from those who come to our shores after having been vetted properly and appropriately. In my view, such fear is politically motivated and limits our freedom to act in a more positive, Christ-like manner. I am fully aware of the terrible tragedies that we have witnessed in our country in the last few years. God weeps with us when we experience violence in San Bernardino, Orlando, Charleston, Boston and Newtown or even in our own families. These atrocities separate us, and tear at the heart of who we are as one human family. Yet, they do not define us. Rather, we must not give in to unsubstantiated fear but hear our Lord’s call to respond with love and compassion to those whose fear is genuine and all too well grounded in reality.

Many are experiencing horrific suffering in places like Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan where wars, terror and violence are common fare. The image of the body of the 3-year-old Syrian Kurdish boy comes to mind. Little Aylan Kurdi drowned and washed ashore in Turkey as his family escaped extreme violence in Syria, making their way to Canada. Our news media have shown us so many more images of unbelievable hardship that it is easy to become numb to such suffering. These are genuine fears; real threats that demand a response from us as followers of Christ. Many in our own Archdiocese of Santa Fe are now living with the real fear of being torn from the country where they finally found relief from persecution and the threat of death – this is the fear that demands a legitimate response from us. We have a moral obligation to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are legitimately afraid of separation from other family members by Executive Orders that have been ill conceived and poorly executed.

It is possible and necessary to stay true to our American values and to remember that welcoming the stranger and staying safe within our homeland are not situations that are mutually exclusive; we can do both—keep our nation safe and welcome and resettle immigrants and refugees who are fleeing extreme violence.

When fear rules, it leads to erosion of the values of freedom, democracy, welcome and the common good that are the bedrock of our country. For people of faith, fear has no place in a country such as ours. As Jesus states in the Gospel of Mark, “Fear is useless; what is needed is faith (Mark 5:36).” Pope Francis reminds us that we “are called to defend and preserve the dignity of your fellow citizens in the tireless and demanding pursuit of the common good.” History has shown that unscrupulous dictators and tyrants use fear for their own benefit to control and manipulate people at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable.

Our country has potent and painful reminders of what happens when fear rules. For example, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the unjust internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, the 1939 tragedy of the S.S. St. Louis in which 937 German Jews were denied entry to the U.S., and most recently, the post 9/11 National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) requiring “extreme vetting” and the discriminatory targeting of Muslims. Our experience tells us that such programs are ill advised and ineffectual, and fail to honor the basic human dignity of those in need. These responses are based in fear. Our Lord himself tells us that fear is useless, that what is most important is love, compassion, and God’s enduring mercy.

America is a nation of immigrants who have contributed much to our country and to the Catholic Church in the United States. Most of us have ancestors who were once strangers to these shores, and who came to America seeking opportunity for a better life. We owe a debt of gratitude for their struggle, their sacrifice and their hard work. As Catholics, we are proud of the first Catholic immigrants who came in the 1500’s. Yes, there is history of violent encounter in those first contacts, and I hope we have learned from those darker moments and atoned for those transgressions.

However, we need not be fearful of newcomers for they are coming with the same hopes and dreams, for themselves and their children, as our ancestors carried with them when they arrived in this country. Immigrants and refugees of all cultures and religious backgrounds are part of the strong fabric of our country. It is patriotic to welcome them. It is never morally correct to target a religious group. Our country has been richly blessed by the contributions of Muslims and so many other faiths in our great land. Catholic Social teaching reminds us of the moral obligation to protect the most vulnerable among us; we cannot allow one population to become scapegoats for our country’s problems.

As Catholics in New Mexico, we have the opportunity to stand with people of all faiths and of all countries as we journey with them. Our great Seal of New Mexico depicts an American Bald Eagle shielding a Mexican Eagle under its wings. This symbol embraces the complex history and relationship between Mexico and New Mexico. As New Mexicans, we know friendship, cooperation and solidarity with our neighbors. It is part of who we are. Welcoming immigrants and resettling refugees who are fleeing violence is part of the fabric of American democracy.

We are called to reach out to those on the margins. We stand with them and honor the human dignity of all people. As followers of Christ, we follow Jesus’ way of the cross, through life, death and the promise of new life in resurrection. Jesus demands that we not think of ourselves first but for the needs and cries of the poor, the refugee and those forced to migrate. We walk together in hope and courage knowing we are all part of one human family.

I want to remind us of what Pope Francis stated in his address to Congress in 2015:

Let us remember the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Mt 7:12). This Rule points us in a clear direction. Let us treat others with the same passion and

compassion with which we want to be treated. Let us seek for others the same possibilities which we seek for ourselves. Let us help others to grow, as we would like to be helped ourselves. In a word, if we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities. The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us. The Golden Rule also reminds us of our responsibility to protect and defend human life at every stage of its development.

I urge all Catholics and people of good will to join me in responding to a request from the Franciscans to pray for peace in Syria by praying daily the beloved St. Francis' Prayer for Peace:

**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
Where there is hatred let me so love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.**

**O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
It is in dying that we are born again to eternal life. Amen.**