

THE MOST REV. THOMAS J. TOBIN
REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP RESPOND TO EXECUTIVE ORDER
CATHEDRAL OF SS. PETER & PAUL
APRIL 2, 2008 – 2:00 PM

Good afternoon.

Along with Rev. Donald Anderson and Rabbi Alan Flam I want to welcome you to our gathering. As you can see, we are joined by members of the clergy, of various faith communities, who have come here to express our prayers and spiritual support to all those whose lives are touched by the intense immigration debate taking place in our State. Many of the clergy present this afternoon work everyday with the immigrant community – with individuals and families, parents and children. They know of their fears and anxieties and their hopes and dreams. The clergy who work with the immigrant community have our admiration, support and prayers.

Today I want to express my own sincere hope that in addressing the immigration question in Rhode Island we can work together in a positive, peaceful and constructive manner. My hope is that the leaders of our State can forge effective and humane policies without harming individuals and families and without dividing the community along ideological lines.

I know Governor Carcieri to be a good and compassionate man, a leader with vision and courage. While I have no doubt that the Governor's Executive Order was well-intentioned, motivated solely by his constitutional duty and his sincere care for the well-being of the State, I also recognize that it has created a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty for many individuals and families. Having spoken to the Governor this morning, I know that he is anxious to alleviate any unnecessary concern people may have around this issue.

I join the Catholic Bishops of the United States in calling for comprehensive immigration reform. Such policy begins with securing our borders and providing for an orderly and welcoming immigration policy. Every nation has the right, and even the duty, to have safe and secure borders. I encourage the members of the Rhode Island Congressional delegation – Senators Reed and Whitehouse, and Congressmen Kennedy and Langevin – to recognize the immigration challenges of our State and to take a more proactive role in promoting positive immigration reform.

In the meantime, while our nation strives toward the goal of an effective immigration policy, the immigrants who are already in our State should be able to live without fear. They should not be persecuted, intimidated or harassed. Immigrants come to the United States to seek freedom and prosperity, to provide a better life for themselves and their families. It is an aspiration shared by all members of the human family. The overwhelming majority of immigrants are law abiding individuals, pay a variety of taxes and contribute to the economic development of our community.

Today we observe the third anniversary of the death of the late and great Pope John Paul II. In his Apostolic Letter, *The Church in America*, Pope John Paul wrote: "*The Church in America must be a vigilant advocate, defending against any unjust restriction the natural right of individual persons to move freely within their own nation and from one nation to another. Attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration.*" (#65)

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I believe I speak for the other members of the clergy present here today in offering our assistance, support and prayers as the State of Rhode Island addresses the challenges of immigration. I believe that religious leaders can and should be a moderating, rational voice in the midst of a very emotional and divisive debate.

Personally, in responding to the immigration question, I will always be guided by the simple and straight-forward words of Jesus: *"I was a stranger and you welcomed me."*

Thank you.