

**Welcome Address
USCCB Immigration Conference
Salt Lake City, Utah**

Most Reverend John C. Wester

“Catholic Public Policy and State Compacts”

Thank you, Kevin, for that kind introduction. I would like to welcome all of you to Utah and thank you for making the effort to come to this conference. This is a wonderful way to celebrate National Migration Week as we join with so many others throughout our country in giving witness to the tremendous contributions our immigrants make to our nation.

I echo Kevin Appleby's remarks and welcome in a special way my brother bishops: Bishop Arturo Cepeda, Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit; Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle and Bishop Eduardo Nevares, Auxiliary Bishop of Phoenix. Thank you as well, Bishop Nevares, for your beautiful homily. In addition, I am pleased to welcome our Mexican Consul, Ms. Socorro Roviroa, a wonderful friend of our community. Also, another big thank you to Kevin Appleby, Tony Cube, Bethany Haworth, Allison Posner and Karen Lucas for their hard work in putting our conference together. I would also like to acknowledge the support and leadership of Ambassador Johnny Young, Director of Migration and Refugee Services and Maria Odom, Director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network. I am especially grateful to my staff for their part in our conference: Mrs. Jean Hill, Colleen Gudreau, Marie Mischel and Ruth Dillon.

Our agenda for these days looks rich and informative, and I know that your presence will help bring it to life. It is my hope that you will leave Utah more prepared to speak out for, and advocate on behalf of, our immigrant brothers and sisters in your own States and localities.

We ask God's blessing on our gathering these few days, especially praying for our immigrant brothers and sisters who bear the brunt of our failed immigration system. And we thank God for our safe journeys to and from the conference.

We are having a very dry winter here in the intermountain region. I am not a skier but I feel for those who are. Of course, we have a saying here: "If you don't like the weather, just wait fifteen minutes!" I think our fifteen minutes are up!

It seems as if time is up as well in terms of waiting for comprehensive immigration reform, at least if you believe some people in Washington. But it is the American public, including the Catholics, who will decide the final outcome. So many people -- so many of you -- have worked so hard these past years to achieve what seems like an elusive goal. Yet, we must never give up hope, and I fully believe that one day we will be successful. In the meantime, we must always keep focused as we advocate for immigration reform in this complex and constantly changing landscape in our country today.

This is an important time in the immigration debate in this nation. While Congress has failed to address this issue, our state legislatures and local governments are not hesitating to attempt to fill the vacuum. Instead of one consistent national policy, we are now confronted with hundreds of State and local immigration policies, the majority of which are harmful to immigrant families and communities.

This issue is very real for us here in Utah, as it is in all of our states. Just before I came here as bishop, on December 12, 2006, there was a raid near St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Logan that resulted in the immediate deportations of 200 of our parishioners. The fact that it took place on the feast of Our Lady of

Guadalupe made the tragedy even worse for all of us. The fear, unrest and shock of that and other raids in our state continue to this day. Just the other day, I was talking to the former pastor of St. Thomas and he told me that many of the immigrant parishioners are hesitant to settle down, to plant roots, to plan for their future here in the United States. They live in fear, this despite the fact that they work hard and productively in our community, serving our needs day in and day out.

Although the moment seems dark and the prospect of comprehensive immigration reform in Congress distant, I believe that the work the church is doing on immigration on a State and local level—both in the past and in the months ahead—could make all the difference in how our nation eventually solves this problem.

Let me explain. Rather than looking at the moment as a daunting—if not impossible—challenge, we should rather look upon it as an opportunity. You may be asking yourself how fighting a record number of restrictive State immigration laws and local law enforcement initiatives could be an opportunity.

Well, it is clear that Congress will not act on this issue unless a strong national consensus emerges, where the majority of Americans agree on a path forward and communicate that to their federal, elected officials. The only way that will happen is if the American people are educated on the issues and the realities of immigration, and that can only occur if the issue is right in front of them, being debated in their local communities.

This gives us the opportunity to go to Catholics and educate them on the immigration issue, to introduce them to immigrants, and to show how life without the hard work of immigrants would affect them. We can and should take advantage of this moment to organize locally, to improve our advocacy and communication, so that we are prepared when the next chance for immigration reform happens at the federal level.

And it will, no doubt. Different laws, particularly enforcement-only initiatives, played out in fifty States are bound to fail, since they will not fix a broken federal immigration system. Immigrants, over 70 percent of whom have been here five years or longer, are not leaving; they are just hiding in fear. The American public will begin to understand that the issue must be addressed comprehensively, on a federal level, and a consensus will emerge. As Winston Churchill once said, “Americans eventually do the right thing, once they have tried everything else.”

Our voice, the voice of the Catholic community, and of so many other communities as well, must be part of that consensus and help to shape it. That is why we must continue to fight the battle locally and remain a voice of faith in the debate.

We also must continue to fight because of the real suffering that is occurring in immigrant families and communities. There are four million U.S. citizen children who have one or more undocumented parents. The combination of Federal-State enforcement partnerships and federal enforcement actions has led to an unprecedented separation of families. Nearly a quarter of those deported in the last year were part of a family with a U.S.-citizen—most likely a child. They also have led to a record number of deportations over the past three years, as is evidenced by over one million persons who have been deported during that period.

How do we fight these State and Local immigration laws? Here in Utah, we have employed the Utah Compact, which helped us define the debate in this State. Three laws were passed—an enforcement law (HB 497), which has been enjoined by the courts, but also a worker program (HB 116) and an immigrant worker exchange program with Mexico (HB 466). Although the guest worker law is probably

unconstitutional, it did recognize the need for a broader solution than just enforcement. The Compact principles also helped diffuse a much harsher enforcement-only bill than was enacted.

Similar compacts, such as the one in Iowa and another one developing in Arizona, can be useful tools for advocacy. They also are consistent with Catholic public policy positions, which are based upon Catholic teaching. For those of you who are not familiar with the compact, it was an effort to bring leaders from the civic, political, religious, business, legal and law enforcement community around a common set of principles, but from a state perspective. These principles are meant to guide our state leaders who must grapple with the realities of a broken immigration system in our country, and more particularly, who hopefully do not forget that immigration is a human, moral issue and not simply a political debate. The Utah compact, for example, contains several elements consistent with such teaching.

First, the compact emphasizes that immigration is best addressed on the federal level, rather than on the State and local levels. This is consistent with Church statements, which reaffirm that migration is a global phenomenon which requires international cooperation among Nation-States. The national level is better positioned to examine all the forces which drive migration, including international ones, and develop a uniform policy and set of rules for immigration into and out of the nation. Interestingly, the Supreme Court will soon decide the issue of pre-emption of federal law over State law, in the case of *Arizona vs. the United States*.

Second, the compact acknowledges and supports the need for law enforcement of immigration laws, but with respect for basic human rights. Additionally, this function is also the purview of the federal government, with State and local law enforcement focusing on criminal acts and the safety of the community. This helps preserve the trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement. It also protects against abuse of immigrants.

Thirdly, the compact talks about the break-up of families. As mentioned, local initiatives have had a harsh impact on family unity. Children are the victims of family separation. As the U.S. bishops have pointed out, a broken immigration system shreds the social fabric of our nation.

Fourth, the compact highlights the economic contributions of immigrants, and how they work in important industries in Utah. This is a point which should not be ignored, and which is often dismissed by commentators. Immigrants, by and large, possess a strong work ethic and enhance our economic life—as consumers and producers of goods.

Finally, we live in a free society, as highlighted in the Compact, in which we enjoy basic constitutional rights guaranteed by our Founding Fathers and our Constitution. Many of the laws we have seen passed—in Arizona and Alabama—threaten these basic liberties. Basic human rights are guaranteed by our Creator.

Here in Utah, we used the Compact as a firewall against harsh immigration enforcement proposals. Although we were unable to prevent an enforcement law from being passed, we were able to significantly change the terms of the debate. The other two Utah laws passed -- the worker program and the immigrant exchange program with Mexico -- acknowledged the other side of the equation—that immigrants are important to the life of the State.

Thus, a State compact can be useful in many ways. While the overall goal of the Compact is to work toward a federal solution, it can be used to evaluate State laws. In-State tuition laws or laws that provide State benefits to immigrants, for example, are consistent with the compact, as they supplement the federal government's role and do not replace it. The Compact can also be used, as we did in Utah, to influence the debate, to provide a more humane framework for the discussion on the State level.

We must not forget, however, that the ultimate goal of a Compact is to build pressure for federal reform. As I mentioned earlier, a system of fifty State laws which supplant federal authority is untenable. I hope the Supreme Court agrees with this assessment in the Arizona case. In this regard, I call upon our own legislature in Utah, soon to convene, to pass a resolution to direct our Utah congressional delegation to lead the way forward in Congress toward humane reform of our laws.

Lest there be any confusion, I think it is important to say that the Catholic Church understands and readily acknowledges the role that enforcement and the rule of law play in our system. Nonetheless, as many here in Utah and across the country might argue, we do not believe enforcement alone is the answer. Rather, it must be coupled with humane reforms in our legal immigration system that will allow immigrants to play by a fair and equitably administered set of rules. That is not the case in our current system -- only the federal government can achieve this balance.

Still, given these realities, I am gratified by the fact that there is now an Iowa Compact which has been released, and an "Arizona Accord," being developed. I hope that you will consider such a tool in your efforts on the State and local level.

I would like to conclude by thanking you for all you are doing on behalf of immigrants. No doubt this work often seems daunting but there are millions of people whom you may never meet who are depending on you.

In his address to the New World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Immigrants in 1985, Blessed Pope John Paul II, of happy memory, stated: "Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to migrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in the universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship..." While Catholic teaching does place limits on this right, the Holy Father clearly sees the importance of recognizing a dignity in all human beings, given to them by God himself. This means that nation states have an obligation to facilitate legal migration to the greatest extent possible in order to protect and honor human dignity. This is particularly true in our country where we have been so blessed.

What is more, we are not only called to honor our fellow human beings but to love them, as Christ himself has mandated. This is especially true of the immigrant, of those who have travelled great distances, endured countless hardships and established themselves in our society as trustworthy neighbors.

We have just concluded the Christmas season, celebrating the birth of our Lord the Savior. As an infant, He and the Holy Family fled Herod as refugees. As an adult, He was an itinerant preacher—a migrant Himself—with "no place to lay His Head." He taught us that in the stranger, we see Him. Do not forget that when you are witnessing before the public square on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters, you are witnessing for Him, "for whatsoever you do for the least of my brethren, you do unto Me."

God bless you.