

# The Dallas Morning News

## Dallas bishop takes issue with FB ordinance

He says anti-illegal migrant law is counter to Christian values

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By SERGIO CHAPA *Al Día*

NOTE: This story stemmed from an on-going saga a controversial Texas town that passed controversial ordinances targeting illegal immigrants. The story ran in the metro section but struck a nerve with readers who poured in more than 100 e-mails of support and criticism for the bishop and myself. It even spurred an organized e-mail chain to complain. Who says people don't read newspapers anymore?

If Joseph and Mary were looking for a place to stay in Farmers Branch, they probably would be turned away, Dallas' Catholic bishop said Sunday.

During a bilingual service for the 2007 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Bishop Charles Grahmann told hundreds at the Cathedral Shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe that immigrants have the right to seek better opportunities.

The bishop said nations also have the right to control their borders, but added that the Bible and church teach that immigration policy should be tempered with "justice and mercy."

The controversial ordinance in Farmers Branch prohibiting the renting of apartments to illegal immigrants was on the minds of Bishop Grahmann and members of the mostly Hispanic congregation in downtown Dallas.

"I often wonder if Joseph and Mary and Jesus would try to find a place in Farmers Branch," his sermon said. "They would probably be told they would have to find another place."

Giving several examples from scripture, Bishop Grahmann said the Bible, the church and Pope Benedict XVI teach tolerance as well as welcoming and giving hospitality to strangers or "aliens."

"Many people have adopted a siege mentality, but as a community of faith, we are judged by how we treat the most vulnerable among us," he said.

In an interview with *Al Día*, the bishop said his grandparents were German immigrants who came to Texas seeking a better life for their children.

He said thousands of immigrants and refugees from dozens of nations have settled in and around Dallas, prompting the construction of 18 Catholic churches in the past 10 years.

"The diocese has 72 churches," he said. "Of those, 50 have a Hispanic majority."

Elizabeth Villafranca, owner of Cuquita's Restaurant in Farmers Branch, gave the first reading at Mass.

She said in an interview that Catholics and Christians need to fight racism and xenophobia.

"It's not enough to show up to Mass and service; it's about living the Gospel," she said. "It's about welcoming the stranger."

Hispanic activist Carlos Quintanilla said the ethnic diversity in the cathedral's parish reflects a reality that officials in Farmers Branch don't want to recognize.

"Immigrants are not one color," he said. "They are from Vietnam, Pakistan, Lithuania, Poland ... all colors. But unfortunately, the ones who have been singled out are Mexicans and Hispanics."

Benjamin Perez came to the cathedral from Garland to celebrate the special Mass with his wife and their two sons.

The Mexican immigrant family was chosen to give the bread and wine offering to the bishop.

Mr. Perez said the experience was an honor for his family and a continuation of the refuge that they and other immigrants regularly receive in church.

"It is important for all immigrants because in church, we feel supported," he said.

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