

NOTE: This letter was published in the Sept. 21, 2017 edition of *The Catholic Spirit*, the official newspaper of the Diocese of Metuchen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Recently, I had the pleasure of celebrating Mass at Holy Family Parish's Sacred Heart worship site, marking the conclusion of my initial pastoral visits to each of the seven churches in the City of New Brunswick. I had been to this parish a few times for Masses throughout the past year, but having three worship sites, this was my first Mass at Sacred Heart. It was a blessed day. On that beautiful Sunday morning, the Church was filled – overflowing actually – with faithful, including families with infants, young children and teens. Beyond their joyful worship and warm hospitality, however, their pain and uncertainty were apparent.

Holy Family is a parish comprised of a large Hispanic population and, among these parishioners, about 85 percent of the youth born here are of Mexican origin. So, the events of the week had brought about much anxiety, hurt and distress for many. They feared for the well-being of loved ones, whose lives were impacted by the natural disasters that had occurred – the hurricanes in the southern region of the United States and the deadly magnitude-8.1 earthquake in Mexico – as well as for their own future in this country following the decision of the recent announcement by our government to phase out the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). This was an executive order that was enacted during the previous Administration and allows about 800,000 immigrants who came to the United States as children to live and work here lawfully. With the rescission of the DACA program, once their eligibility expires, these individuals no longer will be considered lawfully present here and will not be authorized to work. Congress now has six months to pass legislation that would allow them to stay here.

Before Mass began, I met with a group of teens from the parish who are altar servers, parish leaders, catechists – hopefully future leaders in our Church! As we spoke and I listened to them, they were cheerful, engaging and appeared to be typical teenagers. They wore matching T-shirts and were about to slip on their freshly pressed white albs to assist in the liturgy. In that ordinary moment, it was very hard for me to grasp that, indeed, they are the faces of Dreamers, who today are among the most vulnerable in our society. In fact, it was heartbreaking because these youth, through no fault of their own, are at risk of being deported from this country, the only home they've ever known.

Gratefully, my pastoral visit was well-timed as I was able to let all those who are suffering know that, without a doubt, I stand with them in love and the Church does, too. Love means staying with people, and we need to do that for this community now. I also let them know that the Church is trying to do as much as we can to assist our brothers and sisters who are most in need of this love. We continue to seek ways to demonstrate our support through prayer, education, advocacy and outreach at the local, national and global levels. Today, it is my strongest desire that this message of hope, love and solidarity reaches all the faithful who live, work and worship in the four counties of our diocese.

A recent report in *The Star Ledger* states that there are 22,000 DACA recipients in New Jersey and that our state has the ninth-highest number of DACA recipients in the country. Of the 51,000 young people in New Jersey who are eligible for DACA, 28 percent are between the ages of 18 and 21.



Teens at Holy Family Parish, New Brunswick, stand with Bishop James F. Checchio, center, and Msgr. Joseph J. Kerrigan, left, pastor, at Sacred Heart worship site.  
- Erin Friedlander, photo

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Because this suffering affects so many of us, our loved ones, and our neighbors, we all must be concerned about the outcome.

Locally, our Catholic Charities Immigrations Program is focused on processing DACA renewals for individuals whose DACA expiration dates fall before March 5, 2018; and three DACA Renewal Clinics were offered in New Brunswick and Perth Amboy this month. DACA clients make up about 40 percent of our Immigrations Program caseload and, so, our Catholic Charities is planning a series of special Screening Clinics in October and November for DACA recipients to determine if they may qualify for other forms of legal immigration relief.

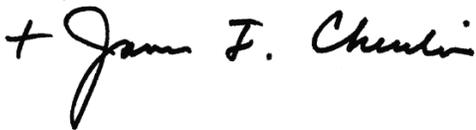
The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey have released statements in support of the DREAM ACT 2017. The bipartisan bill would protect 1.8 million immigrant youth from deportation, including the 800,000 DACA recipients, and offers “conditional permanent resident status and a path to full lawful permanent residency and eventual citizenship.” In addition, the U.S. Bishops have asked the Department of Homeland Security to extend the deadline on the DACA renewal period for those living in hurricane-affected zones to ensure individuals receive fair access to submit their DACA renewal applications. The U.S. Bishops have redoubled our efforts to help find a permanent legislative solution in Congress, prior to the March 5, 2018 expiration of DACA; and we are hopeful that, working together in the interest of the common good, we can get it done.

U.S. Bishops also have spoken out against the Administration’s decision to reduce the number of refugees welcomed in the United States by 50 percent. Instead, the bishops propose that 75,000 refugees be the goal for welcoming refugee admissions for 2018.

While the DACA issue may be foremost in our minds here in the U.S., it is important to recall that the Church stands in solidarity with our migrant brothers and sisters in Christ worldwide. Next week, on Sept. 27, Pope Francis will launch a Global Migration Campaign to support our brothers and sisters who have fled their homes seeking a decent and safe life for their families. Organized by Caritas Internationalis, the two-year “Share the Journey” campaign seeks to promote a “culture of encounter” and aims to increase opportunities for migrants and communities to come together and learn about each other.

As part of the campaign, a week of prayer and action will take place Oct. 7-13, 2017 across the United States and, so, our local Church is preparing to participate in this global initiative. During that week, we are planning to hold a prayer service in Perth Amboy and Deacon Peter Barcellona, one of our permanent deacons who serves as associate director of our local Catholic Charities Solidarity Team, will be traveling to Washington, D.C. with members of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Global Fellows Network to visit Capitol Hill, where they will meet with legislators and lobby in support of DACA. In celebration of the work of our local CRS and Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) programs, we will hold our Annual Harvest for Hope Dinner in October, where CRS’ Joan Rosenhauer will address the topic of Global Migration. Thanks to a grant from the USCCB, we also plan to commence a new “train the trainer” program for Hispanic parish ministry leaders this fall to benefit immigrants and refugees.

Let us join together in prayer for all whose lives are impacted by the natural disasters and the recent DACA decision. Together, let us recommit ourselves to do whatever we can to pray and work for justice and peace, all in the name of love, which is to say, in the holy name of Jesus, Our Lord.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Checchio". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA  
Bishop of Metuchen