Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Today we join with our sister Jesuit parish, St. Agnes, and publicly acknowledge what is already true: that both St. Ignatius and St. Agnes parishes are sanctuaries for migrants, refugees, and other peaceful people who may be subject to exclusion or removal from the United States.

As with other needs in the world around us, our parish community has not stood by quietly in the face of suffering. Since last March, when nearly 30 interested parishioners met with me to begin to pray and discern how God might be calling our Parish to respond to this crisis, we at St. Ignatius have:

- Supported a mother and her children, who were legally seeking asylum in the United States, by joining with St. Agnes to provide food and shelter;
- Hosted a solidarity training session given by Faith in Action Bay Area, accompanied immigrants to their government hearings, and shared observations from those hearings with others;
- Listened to and learned from the personal experiences of migrants like Ariel, who shared his personal journey in a special "Migrant in the Pulpit" weekend in August; and
- Advocated for humane immigration legal reform and protections, including California Senate Bill 54, known as the California Values Act, which protects individuals from being targeted by California law enforcement officials based on their immigration status and adopts due process protections for interactions between California law enforcement and federal immigration authorities.

In short, we already are providing accompaniment, advocacy, and shelter. We already are providing sanctuary.

The decision to publicly affirm that St. Ignatius offers sanctuary comes after much prayer and discernment. Many of you have offered words of support and encouragement through the process, not wishing to miss "an opportunity to follow our Catholic teachings and mission of our Jesuit parish."

Both parish communities reflect our City. They include those who are new to this country, those who are sons and daughters of migrants, and those who trace their ancestry here back generations. We speak English, Spanish, Tagalog, Japanese, Cantonese, and many other languages. Some of us have been gifted with ample resources and skills; others are in need. In our diversity, we make up the Body of Christ. If one part of our body suffers, every part suffers.[1] The current approach to immigration unfortunately has led to needless suffering by many, whether by refugees fleeing war zones or other violence or "Dreamers" seeking to remain with their families in the only home they have ever known.

In our unity, both parishes have responded to the call of the U.S. Bishops issued at the end of January: "Where our brothers and sisters suffer rejection and abandonment we will lift our voice on their behalf. We will welcome them and receive them. They are Jesus, and the Church will not turn away from Him."[2] What we make clear today in our Sanctuary Statement is a direct result of the actions you took in responding to that call.

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[1] Archbishop Cordileone's letter (Jan. 27, 2017)
[2] UCCB Joint Statement (Jan. 30, 2017)

Our Sanctuary Statement is in your bulletin and on our parish website. Fundamentally, it means that we will treat all with the same respect and dignity afforded to any person in our community. Practically, it means that the combined St. Ignatius and St. Agnes communities will build on the actions that both parishes have already taken and we will continue to accompany, support, and advocate for migrants and refugees. We will also continue to look for opportunities to deepen our commitment, including partnering with other parishes with heavily impacted communities, and will participate in larger efforts to raise awareness and support, as described in Pope Francis' Share the Journey Campaign.

This is a serious responsibility – one well-grounded in Scripture and Church teaching – that we have already demonstrated we are prepared to meet. I ask you all to read the Sanctuary Statement with an open heart, pray, and continue to discern how we, as a community, should best respond.

I appreciate that not everyone views our immigration system the same way. Still, I believe we all, immigrants and descendants of immigrants, can agree that the current system in the United States extracts a terrible human cost on individuals and families. Laws should serve human beings and ensure the sanctity of life. Objectively, our current immigration laws do not and they cry out for change. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., harkening back to St. Thomas Aquinas, reminded us: "An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust."[3] I am hopeful that we can grow in our collective faith while helping to bring about a more just system.

I remain deeply moved by the commitment our entire parish community dutifully makes every day, to be women and men for others. We do this already in so many ministries. These good works give light to all within our Church. But the light within a church set on a hill should not be hidden; it should shine out to all. In announcing that St. Ignatius and St. Agnes are sanctuaries, we intend to send that light out across our City and beyond and make our commitment more readily understood by every member of our extended community, no matter their circumstance or background.

I ask that each of you continue to pray for our Parish, and for all the good work that we do for each other and for others. I ask that you pray for steady discernment as to how we might individually, and as a parish, continue to respond to the needs of the greater community. And, if you are interested in doing more in solidarity with migrants, refugees and others in need, I ask you to visit the Parish Website; see the Parish Solidarity Network page under the Outreach Commission link: **http://stignatiussf.org/commission/outreach**. Let us walk together in true grace, with and for those who most need our mercy, solidarity, and care.

As always,

Oremus pro Invicem.

Fr. Greg

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[3] Letter from a Birmingham Jail.