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Immigration of children

Over the last few weeks we have of information from our elected officials, the media and talk shows about children coming across the southern border of our country from countries to the south. They come as refugees with the hope for a better life. The problem is a *respect life issue* that we, as Church, must address and we are doing so through the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops and on a local level through Catholic Family Center's Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Below you will find some highlights about the issue from our perspective as Church, as well as some ideas showing how you can assist in resolving the problem. It's hard to imagine any of the children in our lives leaving home and traveling alone across international borders through violence-plagued regions. So it's astonishing that in 2014 100,000 children, primarily from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, are expected to cross our borders and turn themselves in to border authorities, in hopes of finding refuge and a better life. This exodus is rooted in the violence and unsettledness in their home countries; it is fed by traffickers and smugglers who exploit fear for profit. Astonishingly, recent publicity about these children has unleashed a torrent of mean-spiritedness in our country.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops, in keeping with our deeply held belief in the dignity of all life, especially the most vulnerable, stand among the children's most vocal supporters. Recently Bishop Mark Seitz, Bishop of El Paso, Texas, gave powerful testimony before the House Judiciary Committee. Bishop Seitz had been part of a USCCB delegation last November to the primary sender countries. The resulting report, *Mission to Central America: The Flight of Unaccompanied Children to the United States*, paints a concise but moving picture of the plight of these children. It points to local violence and the breakdown of the rule of law as the biggest factor in their migration.

In his testimony to the House judiciary Committee, Bishop Seitz said: "...the protection of migrant children is an especially important issue for the Catholic Church, as one of Jesus' first experiences as an infant was to flee for his life from King Herod with his family to Egypt. Indeed, Jesus Himself was a child migrant fleeing violence. Jesus, Mary and Joseph were asylum-seekers and faced the same choice as the one facing thousands of children fleeing to the United States each year."

He spoke of the situation of three different children from each of the Central American countries. For these children, returning means a likelihood of continued abuse, trafficking or even death. You can read the full testimony on line at: <http://judiciary.house.gov>. Children are leaving their families and their home countries because they fear for their lives. Focusing on deportation as a solution to this problem is inhumane.

HOW TO HELP: CFC's Office of Refugee Resettlement works with the community to settle legal refugees in the Rochester area. Their funding comes from the same budget allocation that cares for unaccompanied children who enter the U.S. The sudden increase in the number of arriving children means that there is not enough funding to meet the needs of both groups. Without an increase in funding, CFC will not be able to meet the needs of their clients. Calls are urgently needed to ask legislators at the local, state and federal levels for increased funding to cover costs for both refugees and immigrant children.

Have a good week!