

CCUSA and Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops address ministry with migrants

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops joined with Catholic Charities USA to issue the following statement on August 12

*“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25)*

Catholic Charities USA and its 167 member agencies have a long history of serving their communities to help the most vulnerable find affordable housing, access vital food assistance and nutrition, receive mental and integrated healthcare and achieve economic self-sufficiency and stability. When disaster strikes, its agencies provide emergency and long-term relief to help individuals and families rebuild their lives. Additionally, since its founding in 1910, Catholic Charities has provided immigration and refugee services.

Catholic Charities’ work with migrants is rooted in the Gospel and in Catholic social teaching. Agencies along the southern U.S. border, including in Texas, and around the country have provided these services in coordination with the federal government for decades across multiple presidential administrations. Catholic Charities’ efforts are humanitarian, not political.

Federal agencies and local border cities turn to Catholic Charities agencies and other faith-based and local nonprofit organizations to aid them in caring for migrants. This role is as critical as it is turnkey. Once migrants have been granted permission by the federal government to be present in the United States, they are sent to Catholic Charities for transitional care. This care is threaded with the dignity we believe should be afforded to every person -- a warm meal, a shower, clean clothing, medicine and other supplies. Usually, within two days, the migrants leave the Catholic Charities centers to continue their journey while they await their immigration court process.

Many migrants are poor and in need of extended services and Catholic Charities partners with a variety of agencies to attend to those needs. Additionally, some migrants are tragically victims of human trafficking, and our ministries work closely with the appropriate federal, state and local public safety departments to ensure their protection and well-being.

The staff and volunteers of Catholic Charities have the utmost concern for the health of the communities where they live and do everything they can to protect against the spread of COVID-19. They work with government officials to separate individuals and families who test positive to allow for isolation until a negative test is returned.

Of course, we are concerned with the ability of Catholic Charities and agency partners to care for the growing number of newcomers as we recognize the immigration system in the U.S. is in dire need of being revamped. While those laws and trajectories remain outside of our control, Catholic Charities’ humanitarian work continues in full congruence with U.S. law. We are grateful for the ability to work in many border communities in an ecumenical, interfaith way so that together we can serve those in need and keep our local communities safe.

We praise the tireless efforts of the Catholic Charities member agencies at the border and throughout the country in their ministry to migrants. With constantly changing conditions, surges in border crossings, limited facilities, the media spotlight, and the pressures of regulatory efforts designed to curtail their humanitarian work, they march on caring for one human life at a time -- whether it be a fearful child, a parent seeking to provide for his or her family or a potential victim of human trafficking. In caring for the stranger, they are the hands of Jesus Christ.