



Archdiocese of San Antonio



Official Statement Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller December 18, 2014

Archbishop statement concerning immigration detention center in Dilley, TX.

In recent days, I have become deeply troubled by the announcement of the opening of the immigration detention Center in Dilley, Texas. It will ultimately house young mothers with children including other migrants and refugees.

It is the largest facility of its kind and some have called it “History Making”. That forces me to ask, “What kind of history does our country want to make?” Will our history be defined by the detention of children and their mothers who do not threaten us with either violence or security risks? Confining children and their mothers in such detention centers has proven to be damaging to them. I realize that reports about the Dilley Facility draw images of red Christmas bows, flat panel TVs, and colorful classrooms, but prison is prison, not matter how you dress it up.

I fully support the statement published by Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration who said “It is inhumane to house young mothers with children in restrictive detention facilities and should be afforded the full benefit of domestic and international law.” While we urge our government to ensure the protection of their human rights, affording them informed access to due process, I must add that our concerns go beyond legal and civil action. Many of these women are fleeing violence, in fear of their lives and the safety of their children. They need mercy and compassion, not derision and detention. The deep emotional and spiritual wound that have been inflicted on them remain open soars without proper counseling and care. Through Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, we continue to reach out with humanitarian and legal assistance to help these families in this time of personal crisis.

In the pastoral letter, “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops” we find a clear statement of the Catholic Church on this profound humanitarian and moral concern. We recognize the right and responsibility of a nation to protect and regulate its borders,

and enforce immigration laws. However, the U.S. bishops declared that “Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected.”

There is no clear evidence that would indicate that detention acts as a deterrent. This is just another example of the great need our country has for comprehensive immigration reform. I implore our elected officials to stop making immigration reform a matter of partisan politics and reform this broken immigration system. We need the security and clarity of law to properly enforce our immigration laws while ensuring human dignity. There are financially responsible alternatives and compassionate alternatives to the detention of mothers and innocent children. It is time for our government officials to pursue them.

Ours is not a political message, but a one that is based on our most deeply held beliefs that we see the Face of Christ in every person, especially those most in need; those who hunger and thirst for justice and the peace that our faith in Jesus Christ can give. The Holy Family was a refugee family! They fled Herod’s violence, until it was safe to go home. As we prayerfully approach Christmas let us hold in our hearts the plight of all those who are forced to flee in fear.

Thank you and may God bless you at this special time of year. I pray that the hearts of all families, and most especially all children, will be warmed with the Christmas spirit of joy and love.