



Archdiocese of Santa Fe
Office of Communications/Social Media
4000 St. Joseph's Pl NW | Albuquerque, NM 87120-1714
Leslie M. Radigan, Director
505.831.8180 | LRadigan@asfnm.org
archdiosf.org

Archbishop John C. Wester Supports Annunciation House Defending Christ's Mandate Amidst Political Backlash

ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Thursday, March 21, 2024– IMMEDIATE RELEASE – The following is a message from Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe in support of the Annunciation House. “Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you...?” (Matthew 25:37)

For almost 50 years, Ruben Garcia, director of Annunciation House in El Paso, TX, has offered food, shelter, and basic needs to immigrants coming into the United States, many of whom are escaping persecution, economic hardship, and violent crime. With the support of the Diocese of El Paso and its bishop, Most Reverend Mark Seitz, along with those from other religions and non-governmental agencies, Annunciation House has lived out Christ's mandate in Matthew's Gospel to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty and welcome the stranger. For a half-century, Annunciation House has been exercising its religious liberty in our country as it responds to Christ's call to welcome the stranger. That all may end if the attorney general of Texas has his way.

In what appears to be a politically motivated, election-year move, the office of the attorney general is investigating Annunciation House for the unsubstantiated claim that this charitable organization is engaged in “...the business of human smuggling,” operating an “illegal stash house,” and encouraging immigrants to enter the country “illegally because it provides education on legal services.” It is worth noting the enforcement officers of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Border Patrol send immigrants to Annunciation House, knowing these immigrants need compassionate treatment. I agree with U.S. Representative Veronica Escobar, D-El Paso, who said Attorney General Paxton's move is “absolutely terrifying and should send a chill down the back” of those who care about and try to help immigrants.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Catholic Bishops of California have released statements supporting Annunciation House, expressing solidarity with ministry volunteers and people of faith who seek only to serve vulnerable migrants as our nation and state continue to pursue failed migration and border security policies.

This evening, there are Catholic bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful, along with many other interfaith and ecumenical leaders and concerned citizens, who are participating in the Do Not Be Afraid March and Vigil for Human Dignity. This will be a prayerful, public event, which, according to Bishop Seitz, will seek to “celebrate and protect the unique identity of our borderlands as a welcoming community, our freedom to put faith into action on behalf of Jesus Christ present in those migrating, and our duty to stand with those affected by deadly U.S. immigration policies and the passage of recent anti-immigrant laws in the State of Texas.” I fully support this evening's event, and I call upon all Catholics in the Archdiocese of Santa Fe to do the same. As we celebrate our annual Chrism Mass this evening, we will pray for those participating in tonight's march and prayer vigil. We will also be praying for those who are the poorest of the poor, those immigrants trapped in the crucible of violence at home and a failed immigration system in the United States.

I affirm a sovereign country's right to maintain its borders' integrity. But this is not an absolute right that justifies inhumane enforcement tactics. The God-given rights of every human being also have standing and need to be honored. Please join me in praying for our immigrant brothers and sisters and in praying that our country finally achieves comprehensive immigration reform that allows us to grant a home to those deserving of such. We desperately need immigration reform to keep families together, to humanely manage our borders, and to reclaim our rightful place in the world as a country that welcomes those who, as Emma Lazarus said, yearn to breathe free.

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