

Catholic, Evangelical Lutheran Bishops Visit Texas Detention Facility, Call for an End to Detention of Families

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WASHINGTON—Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran bishops visited with young mothers and children who have fled violence in their home countries and are now incarcerated at Dilley Detention Center in Dilley, Texas, on March 27. The faith leaders called upon the federal government to halt the practice of family detentions, citing the harmful effects on mothers, children and the moral character of society.

Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of San Antonio, Texas, whose archdiocese includes Dilley, was joined by Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, auxiliary bishop of Seattle, and Bishop James Tamayo of Laredo, Texas. Bishops Michael Rinehart and H. Julian Gordy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America also joined them on the visit. Since last summer, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has detained hundreds of families at detention centers in New Mexico, Texas, and Pennsylvania, under a new family detention policy aimed at families fleeing violence in Central America.

“After this visit, my primary question is: Why? Why do we feel compelled to place in detention such vulnerable individuals –traumatized young mothers with children fleeing persecution in their home countries?” said Archbishop García-Siller following the visit. “A great nation such as ours need not incarcerate the most vulnerable in the name of deterrence. The moral character of a society is judged by how it treats the most vulnerable in our midst. Our nation’s family detention policy is shameful and I implore our elected officials to end it.”

Bishop Elizondo, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Migration, added: “The detention of families serves no purpose and undermines due process. It especially harms children, who experience emotional and psychological harm from detention. The policy is a stain on the administration’s record on immigration.”

Bishop James Tamayo of Laredo, Texas, said humane alternatives to detention exist and should be used for the population.

“The government should consider placing these families in humane alternatives to detention, where they could live in the community and access needed services, including legal representation,” Bishop Tamayo said. “The Church is ready to assist in this effort.”

Information on the USCCB position on family detention can be found at www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/position-papers/upload/Family-Detention-Paper_Final_-3-19-15-2.pdf

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