

**Purpose of Visit:**

We stand with Pope Francis, the U.S. Catholic Bishops, and the U.S. Jesuit Provincials in asking for immigration policies that honor the human dignity and family unity of migrants, especially asylum-seekers.

Our Faith Teaches Us to Welcome those Who Migrate:

In his message for the 2019 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis said, “We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not only represent a problem to be solved but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved. They are an occasion that Providence gives us to help build a more just society, a more perfect democracy, a more united country, a more fraternal world, and a more open and evangelical Christian community.”

Personal Testimony (if applicable):

Personalize the issue by sharing your story or the story of an asylum seeker. Perhaps they received assistance through a service provided by a Jesuit ministry, such as legal counsel, housing, or pastoral care. Or share a story of how someone was impacted by current asylum policies such as Remain in Mexico, the safe third country rule, or family separation. For examples of personal testimonies or inspiration for stories to relate, see the [Kino Border Initiative Migrant Stories](#) page or the Jesuits’ [website](#) for education on advocacy on migrants.

What we seek:

As members of the U.S. Jesuit and Ignatian networks, inspired by Pope Francis, we want our nation to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate those fleeing violence and insecurity in their home countries to seek asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border. Our network has observed that our nation’s immigration policy is increasingly sacrificing compassion, protection, and rights to due process of immigrants and asylum seekers in favor of policies that impose significant barriers that deter men, women, and children fleeing violence, corruption, and poverty from seeking protection here.¹ The following is a summary of recent measures by the U.S. government and our responses.

¹ Bump, Philip, “Here are the administration officials who have said that family separation is meant as a deterrent,” *Washington Post*. June 19, 2019. Retrieved from <https://wapo.st/2mro57M>; Hackman, Michelle, “U.S.

Remain in Mexico: Our faith calls us to welcome the stranger and treat our neighbor as we would like to be treated. As a result of Remain in Mexico, tens of thousands of people who have sought asylum at the U.S. southern border have been returned to Mexico to await the outcome of their immigration proceedings. Our partners in Mexico share with us that as a result of this policy, asylum seekers are becoming victims of human trafficking, extortion, violence, homelessness, and other inhumane conditions.² While in Mexico, it is also very difficult to find a US lawyer to represent them in their claim. Several U.S. ports of entry have already implemented Remain in Mexico and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) intends to expand it to all U.S. ports of entry, thus endangering even more asylum seekers.

Prolonged Detention Subjects Many Migrants to Inhumane Conditions: Requesting asylum is not a crime. Yet the current administration has dramatically expanded the use of detention, with plans to also begin detaining children and families indefinitely.³ Asylum seekers are forced to wait for months or even years in detention before their case is resolved.

Long-term detention of people not even suspected of a crime is itself cause for serious concern, but even more egregious are the conditions in which many people are held. On a visit in June 2019 to a processing facility in Clint, Texas, Bill Hing, a professor at the University of San Francisco Law School and founder of the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, said, "Several of the younger children I interviewed were unbathed and wore dirty clothes. Some did not have socks. Their hair was dirty...With only a couple exceptions, none of the children I interviewed were offered clean clothes. All reported that the belongings they carried to the border were thrown away by CBP officers."⁴ In the first two and a half years of this administration, at least two dozen people, including children, have died while in or shortly after leaving DHS custody.⁵

Seeks Longer Detentions for Migrant Families," Wall Street Journal. August 21, 2019. Retrieved from <https://on.wsj.com/2Zhy8tO>

² "We Can't Help You Here: US Returns of Asylum Seekers to Mexico," *Human Rights Watch*. July 2, 2019. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2mngkjf>

³ In August 2019, the Trump administration moved to terminate a federal court agreement known as the Flores Settlement Agreement, thereby paving the way for a rapid expansion of family detention and a dramatic increase in the amount of time children may be held in federal immigration custody.

⁴ "Some Did Not Have Socks. Their Hair Was Dirty.' An interview with an immigration lawyer who visited the detained children in Clint, Texas," *Slate*. July 1, 2019. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Lz1YqH>

⁵ Rappleye, Hannah and Riordan Seville, Lisa. "24 immigrants have died in ICE custody during the Trump administration." *NBC News*. June 9, 2019. Retrieved from <https://nbcnews.to/2lurQAR>

Instead, we propose the reinstatement and expansion of the community-based family case management program as an alternative to detention. These programs allow immigrants and refugees to live in supportive and safe environments while service providers guide them through the immigration process. The Family Case Management Program, launched as a pilot in early 2016, respected both human rights and the integrity of the U.S. immigration system. According to the senior vice president of The GEO Group, the prison company responsible for running the program, 99 percent of participants “successfully attended their court appearances and ICE check-ins.”⁶ Case management programs such as these are also more cost-effective than restrictive detention facilities. A case management program costs around \$36 per day for one family, whereas keeping a family together in detention can cost nearly \$300 per person, per day.⁷

Blocking Access to Asylum: The current administration has taken numerous steps to prevent individuals from even accessing asylum in the United States. Under a new regulation put in place this year, only immigrants who have been denied asylum in another country or who have been victims of “severe” human trafficking will be permitted to apply at the southern border of the United States.⁸ The US government is currently engaged in efforts to pressure other countries, including Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador into signing Safe Third Country agreements, effectively cutting off access to asylum in the US for non-Mexicans who arrive at the southern border. These countries are simply not safe places for migrants to stay, nor do they have anywhere near the capacity for giving full asylum hearings to those in need. These current US policies conflict with both US and international law, reverse long-standing asylum practices and will lead to increased migrant deaths as more people are either deported back to danger or attempt to enter the United States through more remote and dangerous routes.

ROOT CAUSES

The systemic injustice that drives migration: Across our networks asylum seekers tell us how much they wish they could stay in their home countries rather than make the arduous trip to an uncertain future here. Catholic Social Teaching calls us to examine the systemic injustices that drive people to leave their home communities and countries.

⁶ Bendix, Aria. “ICE Shuts Down Program for Asylum-Seekers.” The Atlantic. June 9, 2017. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2mmeP5e>

⁷ Timm, Jane C. “This Obama-era pilot program kept asylum-seeking migrant families together. Trump canceled it.” NBC News. June 24, 2018. Retrieved from <https://nbcnews.to/2twwFSL>

⁸ Asylum Eligibility and Procedural Modifications, 84 Fed. Reg. at 33,831. The Supreme Court has ruled that this regulation can be implemented while legal challenges work their way through the courts.

- A complex mix of failed economic models, armed conflict and other forms of violence, and corrupt governance have led to the situations faced today by many around the world, including in the Northern Triangle of Central America and Mexico.
- Rates of poverty and violence remain high in Central America and Mexico—violence in peoples' lives is a leading factor driving migration.
- More extreme weather events, droughts, and rising temperatures due to climate change not only have driven migration due to lack of access to food and water, but also have destroyed livelihoods for farming communities.

ASK: Will the Senator / Representative publicly support the following policies in order to respond to the needs of immigrant community members and systemic causes of migration?

U.S. Asylum Policy:

- Oppose expansion of Remain in Mexico and support efforts to end the program such as the *Asylum Seeker Protection Act*, H.R. 2662
- Uphold U.S. international and national obligations, including the right not to be returned to a place where one has a well-founded fear of persecution
- Oppose long-term detention of asylum seekers, particularly that of families. Support bills such as the *Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act*, H.R. 2415 / S. 1243
- Reinstate and expand community-based family case management programs for asylum seekers

Root Causes:

- Support rights-based foreign policies that assist anti-corruption efforts, community-based violence prevention strategies, and sustainable rural development
- Invest in human capital including increasing quality education and jobs-training programs
- End foreign assistance to governments or security forces responsible for or implicated in human rights violations
- Assist the development of judicial systems that address sexual and gender-based violence and increased access to justice. These programs should be designed and implemented in consultation with and with active participation from civil society organizations