



Helping refugees is a moral obligation

The Catholic Church in Texas, through its members, schools, and social service agencies, has a faith-based tradition of welcoming immigrants and refugees. Currently, the church is providing a helping hand to unaccompanied children and families from Central America seeking asylum, to Cubans fleeing to Texas seeking freedom from communism, to special immigrants (including Christians from Iraq and Afghanistan) fleeing terrorism, to victims of human trafficking, and to survivors of torture.

The Catholic bishops of Texas are disappointed that the state of Texas will withdraw as coordinator of funding for the programs that assist refugees and other vulnerable populations who are here or who will continue to come to Texas. We will miss the state's competent administration of these programs.

The state's decision is around valid and significant questions regarding the border, safety and the rule of law. Yet, our focus as Catholics is to assist refugees to become contributing members to the common good of our local communities and to help them to heal from the trauma of violence in their lives that if unaddressed might lead to rage and the repetition of violence. It is not a matter of a stark choice between the safety of our communities and the welfare of refugees. We are safer when we intentionally and lawfully assist refugees in addressing their real experience of trauma and in becoming active participants in the common good. Catholics will continue to work within the rule of law and in cooperation with local, state, and federal authorities in this important work.

The work of the state and agencies such as Catholic Charities affects real people.

Jimmy Alphonse arrived in Fort Worth after growing up in the Congo. As a teen he was forced to flee his village after witnessing the murder of his family, all the while he was working at a convenience store. After years in a refugee camp, he was admitted to the United States and given a foster family. He put his efforts into making a better life for children still living amid the terror overseas. Jimmy is currently employed and putting himself through school. He is studying international political economy and is interested in serving our country in public office.

Mun Maran was a high school student in Fort Worth after his family fled Myanmar. The transition was difficult, saddled with language, transportation and cultural barriers. But Mun refused to give up. He graduated at the top of his class and is helping his family buy a house. He's now a case manager helping others in need.

It is imperative that we help refugees like Jimmy and Mun when they are at their most vulnerable moments. The church teaches us to help our neighbor and especially our neighbors in need. Pope Francis, in his Sept. 24, 2015 address to Congress, indicated with gratitude and esteem that the United States has always been well-suited and generous in reasonably providing shelter for refugees from war and violence.

The federal Office of Refugee Resettlement has announced that it will implement an alternative method for providing these vital refugee services outside of state government involvement. The Catholic Church in Texas supports a local nongovernment agency filling the service gap that the state of Texas's absence will create and continuing work to assist Texas communities help refugees move from vulnerability to self-reliance.

Olson is bishop of Fort Worth. He, along with the other Texas Catholic bishops, compose the board of the Texas Catholic Conference.