



Statement by Bishop Michael F. Olson  
on the Detention Center in Dilley, Texas

December 22, 2014

The opening of the “South Texas Family Residential Center” in Dilley, Texas, is in part a symptom of our nation’s inability to reform our immigration system, and to respond within the rule of law to an international humanitarian crisis so near to our border. The Dilley Center, operated by a for-profit organization, is in fact a detention center where already traumatized mothers, young children and other family members will be detained and treated as criminals.

As Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Migration, recently stated, “It is inhumane to house young mothers with children in restrictive detention facilities, as if they are criminals. Already traumatized from their journey, these families are very vulnerable and need care and support, not further emotional and psychological harm.”

I join the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Texas Catholic Conference, which represents the bishops of Texas, in asking our leaders to reform our immigration laws so that each legitimate immigrant and refugee is treated humanely and with compassion while providing, within the rule of law, the tools necessary to secure our borders. I also join in the call for our national officials to seek alternative means of caring for our brother and sister migrants and refugees by employing principles and practices such as those based on a case-management model.

The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, through its Catholic Charities of Fort Worth, has cooperated with governmental agencies in providing humane and caring assistance in a warm and safe setting for refugee children and their families through such programs for unaccompanied minors and refugees.

The Dilley Center with its 2,400 beds simply warehouses the frightened and bruised refugees in a detention environment. This only furthers the damage that our current broken immigration system wreaks upon those people who are seeking to meet basic human needs for themselves and their families who are fleeing violence and persecution, or who are here as the result of the actions of others.

I once again call upon each and every one of us to be faithful Catholics and to exercise our civic responsibility by urging our civic leaders to enact policy and programs that treat immigrants and refugees with respect and compassion.

As we reflect upon the mysteries of our Faith during this Christmas season, including the Holy Family’s finding no room in the inn and its rapid flight into Egypt to escape the tyranny of Herod, let us also consider our own responsibilities today for refugees who seek only a freedom from violence for themselves and for their families.