



FRANCISCAN FRIARS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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August 15, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you are aware, we face a humanitarian crisis as tens of thousands of unaccompanied children refugees are seeking safety in our nation. As the leaders of the Franciscan Friars in the United States, we have been honored and humbled to be of service to these children seeking a safe refuge. Our response has included being a place of welcome and pastoral care in our ministries in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California and Mexico. In the Washington, DC area, with its large Central American community, our friars have worked with children in preparing their asylum cases while providing solace to these traumatized children. Several of our ministries are working to provide the humanitarian and economic assistance which is so desperately needed. We also have friars serving the poorest of the poor in Central America itself. They can attest to the rampant violence and disintegration of society there. Nonetheless, they remain unwavering in their service to the people as they attempt to create opportunities for a more hope-filled future.

We offer this litany of our service not to draw attention to ourselves; we are only doing the work to which we were called in our religious vocation. We offer this account to show the credibility from which we speak and now turn in asking you for increased and directed leadership. In particular, we request that you and your Administration do the following to help these refugees:

- 1) We must not return these young people to their countries of origin without them first having a hearing before an immigration judge while receiving qualified legal counsel. We recognize that Congress left on recess without providing the supplemental funding; however, we believe you have the ability to adjust budgets to make sure we are not sending children back to the violence they left, or worse, their deaths.
- 2) While the young refugees are in the care of the United States, it is imperative that they are provided with dignified shelter and care, as well as counseling and trauma support. Please adjust any budgets to give them the resources that all persons deserve.
- 3) We also request that you provide Temporary Protected Status to any persons from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. We believe the level of violence and social breakdown has grown to such a level that sending anyone back to these nations until stability can be achieved is an act against life.

We are reminded in scripture (Matthew 25:31-40) that a people will be judged by how they treat their “least brothers and sisters.” The current situation, with children’s lives in the balance, poses just such a test for the people of our country. We must strive to rise to the best of humanity by providing safe harbor to these children and seeking long-term solutions to their plight. These are difficult choices and directions calling for your leadership. Beyond our requests, we commit ourselves to continue in service to these refugees. We offer our prayers for you and for the traumatized children seeking the chance to live. May the guidance of the One who called the children to himself provide us all the strength and courage we need to make things better.

With sincere prayers,

Provincial Ministers of the Franciscan Order in the United States

Very Rev. John Puodziunas, OFM
Assumption BVM Province
Franklin, WI

Very Rev. William Spencer, OFM
Sacred Heart Province
St. Louis, MO

Very Rev. Kevin Mullen, OFM
Holy Name Province
New York, NY

Very Rev. John Hardin, OFM
Saint Barbara Province
Oakland, CA

Very Rev. Primo Piscitello, OFM
Immaculate Conception Province
New York, NY

Very Rev. Jeff Scheeler, OFM
Saint John the Baptist Province
Cincinnati, OH

Very Rev. Jack Clark Robinson, OFM
Our Lady of Guadalupe Province
Albuquerque, NM