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HEART TO HEART

Emotional encounters mark pope's visit to the Philippines

By JOSHUA J. McELWEE

MANILA, PHILIPPINES · Tearfully recounting her young life spent foraging for food from garbage and sleeping outside on cardboard mats, 12-year-old Glyzelle Palomar had a simple but profound question for Pope Francis.

"Why did God let this happen to us?" the young Filipina asked, covering her face with her hands as she sobbed.

Speaking on a stage in front of some 30,000 young people as part of a meeting between Francis and Filipino youth Jan. 18, Palomar's intense query visibly affected the pope.

"The nucleus of your question almost doesn't have a reply," Francis said, pain etched on his face as he mentioned that he had seen her tears.

"Only when we too can cry about the things that you said are we able to come close to replying to that question," Francis continued.

"Why did children suffer so much?" he asked. "Why do children suffer?"

"Certain realities in life we only see through eyes that are cleansed through our tears," the pope said.

Putting aside a text he had prepared for the occasion, Francis responded directly to the young girl, answering her with a 40-minute reflection on the nature of suffering, love and service.

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—CNS/Paul Haring

■ In Sri Lanka, Francis calls for reconciliation

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Pope Francis embraces Jun Chura, 14, and Glyzelle Palomar, 12, two former street children who spoke during a meeting with young people at the University of St. Thomas in Manila, Philippines, Jan. 18.

Twin Cities archdiocese files for bankruptcy

By BRIAN ROEWE

More than a year after the eruption of a clergy sexual abuse scandal and nearly 20 months into a three-year window loosening Minnesota's statute of limitations, the St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocese declared bankruptcy.

The filing of Chapter 11 reorganization, the 12th U.S. diocese to do so, came Jan. 16 in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court of the District of Minnesota. The development was long expected in a region of 825,000 Catholics where the scandal has seen outrage build and trust deteriorate in the local church.

The archdiocese pointedly stated it "is in this position because of the scourge of sexual abuse of minors." In May 2013, the Minnesota Child Victims Act opened the state's statute of limitations regarding sexual abuse for individuals to bring civil suits through May 2016. The archdiocese has described bankruptcy as "the fairest way" to resolve existing and future abuse claims while at the same time continuing its ministries.

In its court filing, it estimated assets between \$10 million and \$50 million, and liabilities between \$50 million and \$100 million, both figures likely sources of dispute. It listed its number of creditors as more than 200, with clients of attorney Jeff Anderson representing 9 of the 20 largest claimants. So far, the archdiocese has disclosed 62 priests with substantiated claims of sexual abuse of a minor.

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Migrants find welcome with Italian church

By MEGAN SWEAS

ROME AND SICILY · August in Italy is a usually a time for rest and relaxation. But on one Saturday in the summer of 2013, beachgoers in Catania, Sicily, found a boat full of migrants that had crashed off the city's shore. As news spread throughout social media, a group of Catania's youth knew what they needed to do.

Just one month earlier, Pope Francis had used his first papal trip outside Rome to call attention to the flood of immigrants crossing the Mediterranean. In Lampedusa, a small Italian island



—Megan Sweas

Volunteers fold blankets at a reception center for migrants in a church in Palermo, Sicily, in Italy.

about an hour plane ride south of Sicily, he denounced the world's inaction in the face of the most deadly migration path in the world. More than 22,000 have

died attempting to reach Europe since 2000, according to the International Organization for Migration.

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—Newscom/SIP/Nicolas Messyas

A newsstand in Paris displays a poster of the Jan. 14 issue of *Charlie Hebdo*.

ATTACKS: CAUTION OVER ‘NEW LAÏCITÉ’

Continued from Page 5

“We should ask what we are doing, with our writings, speeches and actions, to encourage coexistence and a better reciprocal awareness, and to promote the values of respect, dignity and fraternity,” France’s Catholic daily newspaper *La Croix* commented Jan. 13. “Following the news with a speed close to hysteria, spreading risky, unchecked information, circulating degrading images, expressing or reproducing words of contempt, disavowing and mocking the spiritual dimension ... these create numerous occasions for coming unstuck.”

Dilemmas over reporting religion aren’t new in France, where 40 percent of the population denies any faith, and church and state were strictly delineated under a 1905 “Separation Law.”

When the Socialist Party was returned to the government in summer 2012, it set up an “Observatory on *Laïcité*” to reaffirm secular principles, which many believed had been eroded under Hollande’s center-right predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy.

In September 2013, a 17-point “Charter of *Laïcité*” was sent to all state schools, assuring “respect for all beliefs,” but also reimposing a 2004 law banning Muslim veils and “ostentatious religious symbols.”

Although aimed primarily at curbing fundamentalism among Muslims, who now make up a 10th of France’s 60 million inhabitants, the “new *laïcité*” was viewed cautiously by Catholics too, who traditionally comprise two-thirds.

Some feared the new Socialist initiatives risked exacerbating a sense of alienation among some religious citizens, which appears to have seen its harshest expression in the Paris killings.

Fr. François Euvé, editor of France’s Jesuit *Études* monthly, says he took the controversial decision in mid-January to republish some of *Charlie Hebdo*’s covers that pilloried the Catholic church, to show how Catholics are “capable of keeping a distance” when mocked and scorned.

He admires Jews for their “vigorous capacity for self-derision” and hopes French Muslims will, in time, develop similar spiritual and psychological defenses.

Archbishop Pascal Wintzer of Poitiers is one of many church leaders arguing similarly.

French Catholics are accustomed to seeing themselves mocked and ridiculed, the archbishop noted in a website statement. And among the vast majority, the “ancient French tradition” of satire rarely provokes strong reactions.

Yet both sides should also be showing restraint — “those wield humor and irony,” and “those who feel themselves attacked.”

For now at least, governments in France and around Europe are reviewing security, and counting on religious leaders to help ensure social stability.

In a Jan. 12 appeal, the French bishops’ conference urged Catholics to “entrust to God the blind souls of the terrorists,” but also to remember that all freedoms were “intrinsically linked together.”

If press freedom remained “one of the signs of a solid society, open to democratic debate,” so too did that society’s capacity “to assign a worthy place for every person, with respect for origins, religion and uniqueness.”

“What kind of society do we wish to build together?” the bishops asked. “What place do we reserve for the weakest, for the excluded and for cultural differences?”

Renard thinks it was unwise in the days after the Paris attacks to depict *Charlie Hebdo* as a heroic symbol, and for the new edition of *Charlie Hebdo* to make fun of the Prophet Muhammad again on its cover.

Aided by 14,000 donations, as well as a French government grant of a million euros, the issue was reported by Jan. 16 to have sold 5 million copies worldwide, compared to its normal print run of 60,000. But it will have provoked Muslims again at a time when the time-honored French principles of liberty, equality and fraternity need stressing as never before.

“We should remember that these murderers were French, brought up and educated here in France, and we need to ask how they could have acted in a way which all the rest of society rejected,” Renard told *NCR*.

“We need clear Catholic voices now, with a message about overcoming scorn and contempt. As so often, France is leading the debate in Europe, but not in the way we would have hoped.”

[Jonathan Luxmoore’s latest two-volume book, *The God of the Gulag*, will be published in 2015.]

Desperate Syrian

By CLAIRE SCHAEFFER-DUFFY

Migrant crossing of the Mediterranean Sea took a drastic form during the New Year’s holiday when two freighters, laden with Syrian refugees and apparently abandoned by their crews, headed straight for the Italian coast.

Flavio di Giacomo, spokesman for the International Office of Migration in Italy said Italian authorities are investigating reports that smugglers abandoned the Blue Sky M and the Ezadeen, a former cattle hauler, after locking the ships on autopilot pointed toward Italy. European coastal patrols rescued the two vessels, which were carrying more than a thousand refugees — children and pregnant women among them.

The “ghost ships” are part of a new and treacherous method of passage for Syrians fleeing a war, now in its fourth year. Desperate to enter Europe, they are paying smugglers thousands of dollars for the sea crossing.

Di Giacomo said nearly 170,000 people — a “mixed flow” of asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, victims of sex trafficking, and economic refugees — attempted to enter Italy via the sea last year, four times the number for 2013.

Syrian war refugees form the large-

est contingent. Until recently, their most common path of travel entailed boarding planes to Tunisia then traveling by land to Libya or Egypt where smugglers operated boats going north.

But political instability in Libya and the Egyptian military’s increasingly restrictive control of Egypt’s border have made these routes too risky. Refugee advocates say overland routes into Europe via the Balkans have also become more difficult, especially since Bulgaria’s recent fencing of its borders.

Amid these obstructions, Syrians are choosing new routes of exodus.

Di Giacomo reports that since last fall, large ships, carrying hundreds of Syrians, have been coming into Italy from Turkish ports, which are relatively easy to reach from Syria. Syrian refugee Ali Saed, who purchased tickets in the port town of Mersin for his family’s passage to Italy on a smuggler’s boat last December, described a highly organized operation. “There is a little office near the port where a broker takes your money and gives you a password,” Saed told *The Daily Beast*. “You can wire them the money or give them cash. They sell other kinds of tickets, too, for tourism excursions.”

Passengers on the two freighters that arrived in Italy earlier this year reported paying smugglers between

MIGRANTS: CARITAS TRANSFORMS OFFICES

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“We have fallen into a globalization of indifference,” Francis said. “We are accustomed to the suffering of others; it doesn’t concern us; it’s none of our business.”

Already engaged in social issues, the youth of Catania’s Community of Sant’Egidio were impressed by the pope’s words and deeds. Still, the arrival of migrants on Europe’s shores seemed like a remote issue, both physically and mentally, said Mbaye Gueye, a university student in the group. So when a boat of migrants ended up in Catania so soon after the pope’s speech, it felt like a sign, he said.

Fifteen youth interrupted their summer fun to gather food and clothing from friends and meet the migrants on the beach. They found people their age and younger. Six migrants had died in the accident. One unaccompanied minor told them that his grandmother put him on the boat and said, “Go and save yourself.”

“We went there to create a welcoming climate,” Gueye said. “When you’re in this situation, do you really want food, clothes or something else?”

Their idea of “something else,” Gueye and his friends found, was a vision of fraternal responsibility preached by the pope.

In the past year, the Italian church has had plenty of opportunities to put this vision into practice. In 2014, some 160,000 migrants crossed the Mediterranean to Italy, up from 42,000 in 2013.

Pope Francis effect

Francis’ efforts to refocus the church on social issues have coincided with the surge of migrants taking the perilous trip across the Mediterranean. In October 2013, within months of his trip to Lampedusa, 360 migrants



—Megan Sweas

A torn-up anti-immigrant sign in Rome

died when their boat shipwrecked off the island’s shore.

Both the pope’s moral leadership and the tragedy were credited with pushing Italy to start a search-and-rescue mission in the Mediterranean called Mare Nostrum, or “Our Sea.” Despite the Italian navy’s best efforts to rescue migrants, the United Nations’ refugee agency estimates that more than 3,400 people died in crossing attempts in 2014.

In his November speech to the European Parliament, Francis urged European leaders not to “allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery.” Italy was only able to sustain Mare Nostrum through the end of 2014 and its European Union replacement has one-third of the budget.

Some European politicians argue that search-and-rescue missions encourage risky migration. But the migrants are so desperate that not even winter weather has slowed the crossings.

refugees enter Europe via 'ghost ships'



—Newscom/Reuters/Antonino Condorelli

Migrants stand on the deck of the Ezadeen as they arrive at Corigliano Calabro harbor in Southern Italy early Jan. 3.

\$4,000 and \$8,000 for their sea crossing from Turkey, which can take a week or longer depending on weather.

The high fee offers few amenities, and life jackets are not provided. A cellphone photo taken by a Syrian migrant who traveled on the Blue Sky

M shows hundreds of men sleeping on the floor of a cavernous room that looks like a cargo storage area.

"Migrants [on the Ezadeen] told us that during the trip they were strictly controlled by the smugglers, who forced them to remain seated, and that

the weather conditions were extremely bad," di Giacomo said.

Apparently in order to avoid the authorities, the freighters from Turkey wait in the open sea while smugglers ferry out the refugees in small crafts. Migrants can wait on the ship for hours, sometimes days, until there are enough passengers to make the journey profitable.

Despite the risks and difficulties, boat passage to Italy from Turkey is only an option for middle-class Syrians able to pay the smugglers' high fees. The vast majority of the more than 3 million people who have fled Syria remain in the bordering countries of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, where conditions for the new arrivals are deteriorating.

Di Giacomo told of a Syrian family of 15 who fled to the Syrian border city of Kobani, then to a refugee camp in Turkey. Conditions there were so difficult, he said, they opted to sell their possessions to purchase tickets on a smuggler's boat to Italy.

Such desperation has proved lucrative for some. Italian police estimate smugglers made \$3 million in profit off the 359 passengers traveling on the Ezadeen.

Refugee advocates say they are extremely worried about the emergence of this new illicit enterprise capital-

izing on a conflict that seems to have no end in sight. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees anticipates the Syrian refugee count will climb to 4 million by year's end.

"The predictability of thousands now fleeing Syria every month allows smugglers to plan for a reliable stream of customers, which of course allows them to set a price," said Joel Millman, a spokesman for the International Office of Migration in Geneva. Millman said Lebanon's recent decision to require visas for Syrians entering the country may divert migrant traffic to Turkey and also swell demand for smugglers' services.

The increase in Syrians crossing the Mediterranean comes amid a cutback in European patrol of those waters. Unlike its Italian predecessor, the European Union-funded coastal patrol program Triton does not include search and rescue in its mandate and is only responsible for patrolling the shoreline 30 miles out, di Giacomo said.

"That geographical limitation worries us," he said. "If the flows do not decrease, which is not happening, we are worried that we could see more shipwrecks. More must be done. The top priority is to save lives."

[Claire Schaeffer-Duffy is a longtime NCR contributor.]

INTO DORMS

"The main problem is that there are wars in Africa and Middle East," said Paola Monzini, an independent consultant who has worked with the U.N. and other international organizations on migration and trafficking issues. "Twenty years ago, 10 years ago, people coming by boat were economic migrants, but now 90 percent are people escaping from very difficult situations."

The Mediterranean crossings are not new. While most date the current migration "emergency" back to the pro-democracy uprisings in North African countries in 2011, Salesian Fr. Enzo Volpe said it started more than 20 years earlier. Santa Chiara, where Volpe is director of the Salesian community, began welcoming boat migrants in a poor neighborhood in Palermo, Sicily, in the late 1980s.

Santa Chiara is a small church filled with rare yellow marble and notable artwork. Inside its auditorium, a large hole in the floor reveals a section of Palermo's Punic walls, though archaeologists abandoned the excavation site seven years ago when funding ran out. Sicilians point to their history with pride when explaining why they welcome migrants. Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Normans have all left their mark on the island.

As immigrants started coming to Italy by boat in the 1980s, the church's buildings became dormitories for people with nowhere else to go. The courtyards were like "the central square of a little town," especially on Sunday, Volpe said.

The buildings no longer house migrants because they are not structurally stable, but the church remains the center of a diverse immigrant neighborhood. Today, Santa Chiara's courtyards are full of children in its day care and afterschool programs. In a lively soccer game, a boy with dark black skin yelled in a thick Sicilian



Cots for migrants are seen in a decommissioned church in Palermo, Sicily.

—Photos by Megan Sweas



At a reception center in Italy, a cellphone shows a Syrian migrant on a boat.



GLOBAL SISTERS REPORT
GlobalSistersReport.org

ON THE WEB
For reporting at Global Sisters Report on women religious helping migrants who land in Italy, visit globalsistersreport.org/node/17806.

accent to his teammates.

"They were born here, so they're Sicilian," Volpe said. "These kids are from all over."

Because it was the first group to respond to migrants' needs, the Catholic church became the authority on immigration issues in Italy. Many estimate that the church is responsible for half of the service for migrants in Italy, and Caritas Italiana

(an organization similar to Catholic Charities in the U.S.) claims to be the main organization working on immigration. Francis' exhortations are backed by lobbying by multiple Catholic organizations and their secular partners.

"Without the church, I don't know how [the migrants] could survive," Monzini said.

Off the boat

Next door to Santa Chiara, Caritas Palermo has transformed offices into dorms to meet the current demand for shelter. "With this emergency, we're turned upside down," said Comboni Missionary Sr. Valeria Gandini, whose office had temporarily become a man's bedroom. From May to October 2014, Caritas Palermo took in some 3,000 of the 5,000 migrants arriving in the city.

A few blocks away, a decommissioned church served as the first stop for many migrants. The nave fit cots for 100 migrants, who typically stay a day or two before going out on their own or being transferred to refugee camps throughout Italy.

A Syrian family had a room to themselves. They had arrived 12 days earlier and within two days, the mother gave

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MIGRANTS: DAILY CYCLE OF SURVIVAL FOR ROME'S HOMELESS

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birth to a son, the center's social worker told Gandini, as she cooed over the baby. Adel Al Sawaf, the baby's father, spoke little English and even less Italian, but communicated to the two that he and his family wanted to go to Germany.

You'll have to leave soon before the Italian police ask for your fingerprints, Gandini said in slow, deliberate English.

EU regulations require that refugees apply for asylum in the country where they first enter Europe. In order to make it to Northern Europe, migrants have to travel clandestinely through Italy.

Most migrants, particularly Syrians, don't want to stay in Italy. The depressed economy doesn't provide enough jobs for Italians, let alone newcomers, while the refugee reception system is overcrowded, underfunded and corrupt. Mafia leaders were arrested in November for embezzling funds intended for migrant services. "Do you have any idea how much I make on these immigrants?" one was caught saying. "Drug trafficking is less profitable."

As a member of the watchdog group Borderline Sicily, Lay Comboni Missionary Alberto Biondo has visited many reception sites in western Sicily. Asylum seekers are frequently denied their rights under international law. Even a priest was arrested for requesting money and sexual favors from migrants. Yet, many Catholic organizations are doing all they can for migrants, sometimes even helping them move on, Biondo said.

Gandini tried to reassure Al Sawaf that Caritas would help him and his family. Thin with a short scraggly beard, Al Sawaf mimed guns. Problem, Libya, no money, he said, speaking in phrases. He took out his phone to show a video from their boat ride, his pregnant wife leaning up against the side of the boat with no more than a black inner-tube and his young daughter sitting in an adult's lap with no life jacket.

The vast number of migrants and the speed at which they come and go don't allow Caritas staff and volunteers to get to know them well, Gandini said, but the Catholic approach is to respond to individuals' needs.

On a policy level, this means that the church wants to see EU regulations changed to allow asylum seekers more freedom to go where they may already have family or a support structure. Ideally, more generous immigration policies, through refugee resettlement or more visas, would allow refugees to make it to Europe without risking their lives at sea.

Without a unified European reception system, though, Italian authorities simply look the other way as tens of thousands of migrants continue their journeys north by bus, train or taxi, aided by both smugglers and people of goodwill.

Stuck in Rome

From first reception centers like the decommissioned church in Palermo, migrants are taken to large, overcrowded refugee camps, where they can live while applying for asylum, a process that can take a year. But the camps are open, allowing migrants to come and go as they please.

After a week in a refugee camp in Southern Italy, two young men de-



—Megan Sweas

Migrants sit in Parco del Colle Opio overlooking the Colosseum in Rome.

cided to leave for Rome. Redone and Bayiam traveled from Eritrea together, and were now living on the streets near Termini, the central train station in Rome.

An Eritrean nun brought them food, and they had each other — for the moment. Redone, 20, planned to travel to England. After Syrians, Eritreans are the second most common nationality crossing the Mediterranean into Italy. A brutal dictatorship and mandatory military service qualifies them

**‘They know our problem;
they know that we’re crying
for life; they know our difficulties.’**

for asylum in Europe. Redone's older brother made the same trip to England five years earlier, also when he was 20.

Bayiam, though, had been forced to give his fingerprints at the camp in Southern Italy. He would have to stay and wait for asylum. "I hate Italy," he said, using Redone as his translator.

He does not have to look far to justify his pessimism. All around Termini, migrants loiter as if waiting to go someplace. In nearby parks, they sit alone or in groups in the shadows of Roman ruins. Young African men walk around with ear buds in and a plastic bag containing their possessions, while those who've been in Italy for years hawk purses, umbrellas or small trinkets. Many migrants end up jobless and homeless.

Maiga Issaka, from Mali, was homeless while awaiting a spot in the government reception system. He slept alongside other migrants and Italian homeless outside the train station. The police wake them up before dawn, so that tourists boarding airport buses don't see them, Maiga said. He cut through a back tunnel to avoid the commuters, ashamed of his uncleanness. He hid his cardboard and bedding behind some scaffolding — until the police found it and threw it away.

Then, the daily cycle of survival started. Walking around Termini's neighborhood, Maiga pointed to doors

where breakfast, shelter or a shower could be found at churches and convents. Sometimes a piece of paper taped to the door indicated hours. At other places, you just had to know where and when to show up.

In the afternoon, homeless migrants find their way to Jesuit Refugee Service's Centro Astalli, which serves up to 400 meals a day. Centro Astalli provides legal, medical and psychological assistance; shower facilities; and a mailing address that the homeless can use to apply for asylum.

Centro Astalli also operates four government-funded homes for refugees in Rome, part of the System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). After their asylum application has been recognized, refugees can move from the large camps to SPRAR, where they receive individual attention and an integration project, including language and job training.

It's a quality program, said Chiara Peri, project manager for international relations at Centro Astalli. But "even when you are in a center for six months or maximum one year at the SPRAR, it's not enough to become fully independent."

Migrants often take odd jobs, work for slave wages in agriculture, or are pushed into prostitution. Even if they find low-wage work, it's difficult to save up for an apartment.

A half a dozen refugees have found housing, thanks to two religious congregations that volunteer guest homes to Centro Astalli. Early in his papacy, Francis visited Centro Astalli and asked religious to open their empty spaces to refugees.

"Our idea is to offer a little support for the last phase of integration, which is the weakest point of the system," Peri said, acknowledging that Centro Astalli doesn't intend to create a systemic solution to refugee homelessness. "This can only be a responsibility of the state."

Maiga would still be homeless if it weren't for the Joel Nafuma Refugee Center at St. Paul's Within the Walls, another church where migrants can hang out during the day and access services. St. Paul's, the American

Episcopal church in Rome, agreed to give him a room in the rectory after his time in the government reception system ended, hiring him to provide security.

Other migrants pool together their resources to rent cheap rooms on the outskirts of Rome or take over abandoned buildings with the help of Italians.

Redone and Bayiam spend their days near an office building occupied by 400 Eritreans, Ethiopians and Sudanese. All residents must have refugee status, excluding recent arrivals like them.

The "Palace," as residents call it, is one of several occupied buildings around Rome. An Italian association helps migrants scout and take over such buildings, and the government rarely bothers to cut off electricity or services.

"They know our problem; they know that we're crying for life; they know our difficulties. I think they can accept it," a member of the Palace's leadership committee said about the government's inaction. Still, he asked not to be named because occupation is illegal. The council sets and enforces basic rules of decent behavior to ensure they remain good neighbors. "From my point of view, it's going well," he said.

Weary welcome

In another area where migrants live in abandoned buildings, Italians are less forgiving. Last fall, anti-immigrant riots broke out for a week in a largely immigrant neighborhood on the outskirts of Rome. Francis called for parishes to become places of dialogue between Italians and migrants in his weekly address following the riots.

Thanks in part to the pope, anti-immigrant sentiment is generally down compared to 2011, the last time Italy saw a great increase in migrants. "Our idea was that we have double the people [compared to 2011], we're probably going to have double the problems, but this has not happened," said Oliviero Forti, head of immigration for Caritas Italiana.

But even without outward signs of hostility, migrants largely feel isolated. The leader of the Palace points to the occupied buildings as a sign of the lack of integration. We knock on the door, he said, "but if they don't open it, we have to come back to our society and live together like this."

In Catania, too, many have grown frustrated with the constant state of emergency.

Still, about 200 youth involved in the Community of Sant'Egidio have continued to organize online to bring food, clothing and love to the migrants. The authorities call Sant'Egidio first when a boat is on its way, Emiliano Abramo, an adult leader of Sant'Egidio's youth group, said with pride. But it has caused a generational conflict.

Parents tell their children to think about their own futures, he said, but the Gospel tells them to love others as you love yourself.

The Gospel wins, Abramo said. "When you think about people who can help others, you think about politicians and people who have money, but these young people are the real soul of Sicily."

[Megan Sweas is a freelance journalist based in Los Angeles. Reporting for this article was supported by a grant from the International Reporting Project.]

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At San Francisco school, priests stir parental ire

By DAN MORRIS-YOUNG

SAN FRANCISCO · Star of the Sea School in the San Francisco archdiocese has become a kind of war zone between the majority of school parents and Star of the Sea Parish's two priest leaders — Fr. Joseph Illo, administrator, and Fr. Patrick Driscoll, associate pastor.

The priests began their assignments there last August as part of a plan to establish an oratory, or a kind of fraternity where diocesan priests live in community.

Battle was engaged in November when Illo announced that girl altar servers would be discontinued. Made without known consultation with parents or other archdiocesan priests, the decision generated parental protest, local headlines, and eventually national media coverage.

Illo's actions were also the subject of heated exchanges at an archdiocesan priests council meeting, NCR learned.

Star of the Sea generated more heat in early February when it came to light that Driscoll had distributed to even young students a pamphlet titled "Examination of Conscience and Catholic Doctrine," an extensive listing of potential sins, including adultery, masturbation, fornication, entertaining impure thoughts, and abortion — without notifying teachers or the principal.

Parents and teachers reportedly retrieved the pamphlets as quickly as they could. Driscoll and Illo later apologized.

Parental ire increased further when Illo dropped the long-standing practice of blessing non-Catholic children who presented themselves during the Communion rite at Mass,

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—AP Photo/Eric Gay

Detained immigrant children line up in the cafeteria at the Karnes County Residential Center, a temporary home for immigrant women and children detained at the border, Sept. 10, 2014, in Texas.

STILL WAITING

Immigrant families languish in Texas detention

By DAN STOCKMAN

Women and children fleeing horrific violence in Central America remain caught in the wheels of the American immigration system, advocates say, despite a court order that the government take their cases seriously.

"They feel besieged," said Yvonne Dilling, a lay missionary with the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. Dilling visits people detained at the federal government's family detention center in Karnes City, Texas. "Some are in and out in a month or so, others are just held there, and no one seems to be moving their case forward at all."

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Mercy blog explores death as a part of life

By ELIZABETH EISENSTADT EVANS

Before hospitals and then funeral homes made death and dying an antiseptic set of rituals performed away from the sight of grieving relatives, it was very much a family affair.

Now a number of reformers, many of them young, often speaking from a decidedly secular perspective, want their families to have control over decisions that were once routine — death at home, cleansing of the body, natural or "green" burials.

In Los Angeles, mortician Caitlin Doughty, author

of *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes & Other Lessons from the Crematory*, helms the Order of the Good Death, a "group of funeral industry professionals, academics, and artists exploring ways to prepare a death phobic culture for their inevitable mortality."

Mortician Caleb Wilde is as well-known for his sometimes cheeky Twitter bon mots and pictures as for his multifaceted musings on his blog, *Confessions of a Funeral Director*, which covers topics such as coping with miscarriage, and when and how to involve children in funerals.

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Mercy Sr. Mary Ann Walsh shows a prayer shawl given to her by a former colleague.

—Sisters of Mercy of the Americas/Catherine Walsh

This issue was mailed on April 3.



—Newscom/Reuters/Pool

Catholic Charities volunteers in McAllen, Texas, assist immigrant families from Central America in July 2014. After surrendering themselves to U.S. authorities at the border, the immigrants were able to prove they had relatives in the U.S. who would sponsor them and they were dropped off at the Catholic Charities center.

DETENTION: SITUATION WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE CHANGED BY NOW

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More than 1,000 families remain in detention, mainly in Karnes and at Dilley, Texas, where advocates say they are traumatized and depressed as their cases languish in the immigration court system.

The number of families in detention has remained about the same, despite the government closing the detention center in Artesia, N.M. Dilley, which opened in December, is able to hold close to 500 people but will ultimately be able to house 2,400. Karnes is doubling in size to house 1,200. Both are run by private contractors.

Dilling said the detainees fleeing violence in their home countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, come from areas where the government has broken down and is unable to protect its citizens, only to be detained in the U.S. while seeking asylum. The fact that they are in detention means they've already met with an asylum officer who has determined they have a "credible fear" of persecution back home — meaning their asylum case has merit — or they would have already been deported.

But here they sit, trying to raise children. Dilley is southwest of San Antonio; Karnes is southeast of the city — both in remote, isolated areas. While Karnes has grass and trees, Dilley is described by those who have been there as desolate, with a landscape of dirt and gravel.

On March 27, several bishops toured the Dilley detention center and met with families there (see Page 9). Among those touring were San Antonio Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller; Eusebio Elizondo, auxiliary bishop of Seattle and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration; Bishop James Tamayo of Laredo, Texas; and two leaders from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Bishop H. Julian Gordy and Bishop Michael Rinehart.

What the government calls family detention is much more like prison, advocates say.



—Newscom/ZUMA Press/Bob Owen

An Immigration and Customs Enforcement official is seen at the South Texas Family Residential Center at Dilley on Dec. 15, 2014, during a tour of the facility before it opened.

"The laws are very complicated, the women don't really understand them, and the access to translators is not always there for them," Dilling said. "Frequently they come out and say to me, 'I got all these documents and they're in English. Can you tell me what they say?'"

Dilling said she knows the damage being done to families just by seeing how much her visits mean to them. Dilling is able to visit detainees only because her contact information is passed along and she is invited by detainees as a friend.

"That's what the women express over and over again — that it means so much that someone besides their family members knows they're there and cares that they're there," Dilling said. "I never before truly understood the power of Mathew 25:35 ['I was in prison and you visited me']. Human contact is just so valuable, and that's what the women and children express over and over again."

Dilling has been a lay missionary to Central America most of her adult life, with much of her time spent in El Salvador and Honduras, where she developed a large network of friends.

So when she got a phone call from a relative of a detained family asking if she could visit them, the decision was easy. Now people pass on her contact information and the visits have become part of her mission.

"Now I've just kind of stepped it up," Dilling said. "I try to keep it in a pastoral role, but you also naturally become an advocate. I'm visiting them as a friend, but I live out my faith in everything I do, so it's a pastoral visit, as well as a peace and justice mission."

Even more galling to advocates is that the situation was supposed to have changed by now.

Ruling changed little

On Feb. 20, a federal judge ordered the government to stop wholesale detention of asylum-seekers as a way to deter other would-be immigrants. Instead, the court ruled, each case must be reviewed, and detention decisions must be based on whether the asylum seekers present a risk to public safety if released while awaiting their court date, *The New York Times* reported. Lawyers expected women and children would begin to be released within a week.

That hasn't happened.

Instead, said Catholic Legal Immigration Network attorney Michelle

Mendez, the government has set large bond amounts for families, putting release within their grasp, if only they could afford it.

Mendez recently spent two weeks working at the detention center in Dilley, where she said bond amounts averaged between \$7,500 and \$15,000.

"It makes it a very, very cost-prohibitive decision," Mendez said. "The women can get those bond determinations reviewed by an immigration judge, but when I was there I didn't see a ton of significant decreases of those amounts. By and large, the women were not able to pay."

That leaves them in detention until their case is heard, which could be months if they have an attorney, or much longer if they do not.

Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC) and other organizations are working together to ensure detainees not only get legal assistance while inside, but that the assistance continues after they are released. Those with attorneys are much more likely to be released, advocates say. Those without lawyers face trying to understand the legal process and getting documents to the court in another city — sometimes as far away as Denver, where an immigration judge hears cases via video-conference, in English. If they're released, the struggles continue.

"They face misinformation from the community and people posing as immigration attorneys trying to take their money," Mendez said. "But the statistics show that the women who have some type of legal assistance have a very, very high rate of showing up to court and completing the process."

Women still in detention have a fear of government from back home, Mendez said, and they don't know whom to trust. "They have these horrible stories, but they're in detention and can't get out and it's clear the government isn't really trying to help them."

They also feel pressure, she said, to simply go back home.

"When I was down there, some of the things were heard were that women were told, 'Your bond is this. If the judge doesn't lower it, you'll have to spend eight months in here fighting it, so you might as well just sign your deportation papers and save yourself and your children eight months in detention,'" Mendez said. "Those were rumors we couldn't confirm, but clearly the government's emphasis is on deportation, not granting asylum."

Of course, everything is easier — and faster — if you have an attorney. For months, CLINIC has been one of the groups coordinating the efforts of volunteer attorneys and providing technical support, training and supplies. Under a partnership with other agencies, CLINIC will soon have a full-time attorney at Dilley, plus support from Mendez in Washington, D.C., as well as the volunteers who come in for a week at a time.

How great is the need for attorneys? Law students are spending their spring breaks volunteering, and they are warmly welcomed.

"The need is that great that we're even taking law students," Mendez said.

But with much of the focus on detention in recent months, a broader need has quietly slipped from the headlines.

Thousands more need help

While immigration officials are indeed detaining asylum seekers at the border and it is difficult to leave



ON THE WEB
See story online at
GlobalSistersReport.org/node/22421.

Faith leaders call for end to 'harsh policy' of detaining immigrant families

By NURI VALLBONA

DILLEY, TEXAS • Faith leaders from around the country decried the detention of immigrant families seeking asylum, calling it inhumane, shocking and a violation of human rights, and in a letter called upon President Barack Obama to end the practice.

"It is clear there is no humane way to detain families," said Linda Hartke, president and chief executive officer of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. "Children, many of whom are babies and toddlers, do not belong in jails, nor do their mothers, who've acted only to protect and save the lives of their children."

The announcement came March 27 after the group toured the newest detention facility in Dilley. In a press conference at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Dilley, five Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran bishops, a religious sister, and Hartke announced that a letter calling for the end to the detention of immigrant families had been sent to Obama. It was signed by 80 religious leaders representing the Jewish and Christian faiths.

The group made the announcement after a tour and meeting with some of the 178 families currently housed at the South Texas Family Residential Center. The country's largest immigration detention facility, the center can hold up to 2,400 people.

The leaders also criticized the "impossibly high" bonds that had been set for asylum seekers and described emotional encounters with immigrant mothers who rushed to hug the bishops when they arrived.

"Tears, tears, tears," said Bishop Michael Rinehart of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "Every person I spoke with today had tears."

Auxiliary Bishop Eusebio Elizondo of Seattle, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration, described a similar scene: "I saw nothing but tears in all these people, in all these mothers, but also what I saw is a lot of fear. A lot of fear that they're going to just be deported again, sent back to their own countries, to the violence and persecutions they were suffering."

Speaking in English and Spanish in front of a mural depicting St. Juan Diego and the Virgin of Guadalupe, the



—Nuri Vallbona

From left, Catholic Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller, Evangelical Lutheran Bishop Michael Rinehart, and Catholic Bishop James Tamayo of Laredo, Texas, during a press conference at St. Joseph Catholic Church March 27 in Dilley, Texas

bishops criticized the Obama administration's detention policy, saying these families, many from Central America, were not a threat to national security.

"Why? Why do we feel compelled to place in detention such vulnerable individuals, young mothers with children who are fleeing persecution in their home countries?" asked Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller of San Antonio. "It is clear from our interactions today that these families are not [a] threat to us. It is obvious they are humble, genuine, searching for a better life and fleeing violence and persecution."

In the letter addressed to the president, faith leaders voiced similar sentiments, calling upon Obama to "end the harsh policy of family detention."

They also expressed concern that the practice is "inhumane and harmful to the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of this vulnerable population."

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials issued a statement in response: "Family residential centers are an important part of the U.S. government's comprehensive response to the unprecedented spike in illegal migration that occurred last summer."

Despite the criticism leveled at his administration, Obama has generally favored policies that provide deportation relief to undocumented immigrants. Last year, he took executive

actions that would have granted a temporary halt to deportations, allowing more than 4 million immigrants to apply for work authorizations, but a federal judge in Texas halted the new policies. Arguments to implement them will be held in the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in April.

Bishop H. Julian Gordy, chair of the Conference of Bishops Immigration Ready Bench of the Evangelical Lutheran church, said Washington officials told him that detention is a "tool, a kind of deterrence" to keep more people from coming.

"It seems to me that if it is a tool to send a message to other countries, I'm not certain that it's effective for that purpose," Gordy said. "There are plenty of people still coming. I know that it's been effective to a really distressing degree in separating families from one another and then causing great distress to families."

Gordy also said that using detention as a deterrent violates international law.

"We subscribe to the United Nations convention on asylum, and using detention as a way of deterrence is not allowed in that convention to deprive one group of its liberty to make a point with another group," he said.

U.N. guidelines, published in 2012 state: "In view of the hardship which it entails, and consistent with interna-

tional refugee and human rights law and standards, detention of asylum-seekers should normally be avoided and be a measure of last resort."

While the bishops did not voice complaints about the facility in Dilley, they worried about the emotional toll of incarceration and the lack of due process.

"Their lives are marked because they are people who are unwanted, and that due process is not taking place," Garcia-Siller said.

Yvonne Dilling, director of mission education with the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in San Antonio, said she has seen what the prison-like environment can do to families.

"I've seen so much depression in the children," she said, describing a conversation she had with a 9-year-old boy she met at the detention facility in Karnes, Texas. "I asked, 'You've been here seven months. What do you do here to keep from getting sad?' He just burst into tears."

But in its statement, ICE said, "Family residential centers are an effective and humane alternative for maintaining family unity as families go through immigration proceedings or await return to their home countries."

The bishops also criticized the "unreasonable" and "unreachable" bonds that many poor families could not afford to pay.

"They can come up with a bond, an impossibly high bond — the lowest I heard was \$7,500 — or they can be deported back to the violence and terror that started all this," Gordy said.

As a solution, the bishops recommended that the immigrants be released to the community.

"There are humane alternatives to the detention of these families where they could be cared for in the community and provided appropriate support, including legal representation," Garcia-Siller said.

Elizondo said he knew of "at least 50 lawyers who are ready to help." He said he intends to keep advocating so they will be allowed to visit asylum seekers.

But a higher calling also compelled the faith leaders to speak out.

"The Bible is very clear: We are called to welcome the stranger," Hartke said, vowing that the group would "redouble" efforts to close family detention centers.

"They are inhumane, they are unjust, and they are destructive to children and families. They are contrary to our values to our country and as people of faith."

[Nuri Vallbona is a freelance documentary photojournalist who has focused most of her career on social justice projects. She worked for *The Miami Herald* from 1993 to 2008.]

detention, not all asylum seekers are detained. In fact, officials say, only a fraction of them are detained as part of the government's efforts to send a message to others that they not try to come to the U.S. The majority of those apprehended are given a date to appear and are released on their own recognizance. When their court date comes up, they can then argue their case for asylum.

Missionaries of Jesus Sr. Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, helps those released in Brownsville, Texas.

Pimentel said the immigrants are released at a bus station, where officials from Catholic Charities or one of its many partners are waiting for them.

"They're on their own without any help at all. They're abandoned in the streets," Pimentel said. "The clothing they have is soiled and dirty. But we have a respite center where they can shower and clean up. It's a whole operation we have set up through donations and volunteers."

Once their immediate needs are provided for, the immigrants are sent to the homes of friends, relatives or others willing to take them in, settling them across the country.

Pimentel said the work began June 9 when she got a call from a local priest in the Brownsville diocese, saying parishioners were at the bus station trying to help, but were overwhelmed.

"He said, 'You need to help us.' We had no clue what was ahead of us,"

Pimentel said. "That first night we helped 200 people."

At times, there were 300 people a day, she said. And though the volume has slowed, there are still 30 to 60 people every day who need help. Since June 9, she said, Catholic Charities has helped more than 18,000 people.

Pimentel said her agency was already helping immigrants, but the numbers were small.

"We had no idea what we embarking on," she said.

She also had no idea of how people from all over the country, from every faith and denomination, would pitch in to help.

"The response has been overwhelming. We have volunteers from everywhere," Pimentel said. "We have ev-

eryone by our side."

She said the volunteers have ranged from Catholic sisters to rabbis to evangelical Christians.

"It's very, very rewarding to see how we've come together," Pimentel said. "The want us to tell them the needs and how they can help — we're all united in the same response."

She said that aspect has been a source of hope amid the tragedy of thousands of people having to leave everything behind to flee violence.

"It's such a great example, it's really beautiful," Pimentel said. "It's a sad story, and yet at the same time to see that response just lifts me up every day."

[Dan Stockman is national correspondent for Global Sisters Report.]