

Immigrant children deserve security and compassion (guest column)

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This summer, Americans are witnessing a humanitarian crisis within the United States. Tens of thousands of Mexican and Central American children are fleeing rampant violence and misery in their home countries. To find peace, these children have placed their lives in great danger by attempting to navigate the treacherous American border. Now, photos of over-capacity holding cells, small children arriving without a mother or a father, and trains carrying hoards of people illustrate the immediate need for safety and compassion.

Regrettably, the possible arrival of these immigrant children to a small Michigan community and elsewhere in the country has been met with protests and hints of xenophobia. Lost in the public outcry is a recognition of the reality of migrants. Third-world poverty, suffering and ever-present drug and gang violence permeates the day-to-day lives of the many unaccompanied young persons who have arrived. Along with a lack of clean water, electricity and stable housing, it is fathomable, yet heart-wrenching, to consider a parent allowing their small child to migrate to a distant land.

Frustration over failed immigration policy is understandable, but this is not the time to hold children accountable for a failed American border policy or a foreign country's economic and political problems. Regardless of their citizenship, every human person, especially a child, is deserving of dignity. International attention and compassion has percolated in recent weeks, and the crisis taking place at the border has prompted Pope Francis to address the matter.

In a [recent message](#) delivered to a Mexican gathering on human migration and development, Pope Francis stated that "a change of attitude toward migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization — all typical of a throwaway culture — towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world."

Pope Francis is no stranger to addressing concern for vulnerable immigrants who have undertaken perilous journeys. In his first trip outside of Italy, the Holy Father recognized at the Sicilian island of Lampedusa the death of thousands of migrants seeking safety in Europe. Are Americans equally willing to recognize and condemn the fatality that occurs for those, including children, who have washed up on the shores of this country?

Perhaps policy change should begin with a collective change of national heart, with people of good will expressing themselves in a manner that is civil and respectful, recognizing the horrors and dangers that immigrants experience, and avoiding [acts and threats of violence](#). A change of heart also involves seeing the immigrant as a person, a human being with God-given rights to live in peace without the daily threat of violence and suffering that afflicts both community and family.

Regardless of the manner by which they arrived, scores of children are now in desperate need of help. In addition to basic material items such as clothing and shoes, Catholic institutions and volunteers near the border are [answering the call](#) by providing shelter, hygienic goods and medicine to starving and injured children, some of whom are only days and weeks old.

This is a summer of conscience for the United States. How will the nation respond?

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