



DIOCESE OF CHEYENNE

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Diocese of Cheyenne Opposes For-Profit Detention Center

A for-profit detention center is being planned for Evanston, WY. The Management and Training Corporation (MTC), the third largest U.S. for-profit prison corporation, is seeking to build the new 600-bed immigrant detention center. MTC's proposed facility would meet a federal request for a new ICE facility near Salt Lake City, UT.

Do the people of Wyoming want to lend support to for-profit prisons? Should our justice system outsource the detainment of asylum seekers and migrants to for-profit companies who are not monitored for proper care of detainees? For-profit detention centers like MTC have a reputation for cost-cutting, poorly-run facilities and abuse.

The following statement is from the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security. "U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) contracts with 106 detention facilities to detain removable aliens. Since the beginning of FY 2016, ICE has paid more than \$3 billion to the contractors operating these 106 facilities. Despite documentation of thousands of deficiencies and instances of serious harm to detainees that occurred at these detention facilities, ICE rarely imposed financial penalties."

<https://www.oig.dhs.gov/taxonomy/term/1677>

In June, a pediatrician visited 39 detainees and performed medical exams on 21 infants and children at a detention center in McAllen, TX. Dr. Dolly Lucio Sevier said, "The conditions within which they are held could be compared to torture facilities.... That is, extreme cold temperatures, lights on 24 hours a day, no adequate access to medical care, basic sanitation, water or adequate food"

<https://www.apnews.com/12be1d74c96c4fdb44eb7167a321d6c>.

Is this a just and morally responsible way to treat our brothers and sisters fleeing violence and poverty? Is this how we ought to love our neighbors, the immigrants who have been productive members of our communities for many years and who are now living in fear of being rounded up? For those who share Christian roots, we seek to live according to the words of Jesus who said: "*I was a stranger and you welcomed me. . . Whatever you did for one of these least brothers (and sisters) of mine, you did for me*" (Matt. 25:35, 40).

As the Catholic Bishop in Wyoming, I stand in opposition to the establishment of an ICE for-profit detention center in Evanston, and anywhere else in our state. I invite all people of good will to join me in seeking a more just and morally responsible manner to treat our fellow human beings. Just as we seek to protect the lives of innocent unborn children, so must we treat asylum seekers and migrants as human beings created in the image and likeness of God. If we do not, then we are eroding the respect for all human life. Then we are being anti-life.

The situation with migrants today is similar to the Israelites who migrated to Egypt because of famine. Later, after they were prospering in the Promised Land, the Lord ordered them to treat any foreigner with proper care. He said, “*You shall not oppress or afflict a resident alien, for you were once aliens residing in the land of Egypt*” (Exod. 22:20). Today, this commandment is directed to us.

Furthermore, I urge all citizens to oppose the inhumane practice of separating children from their parents, incarcerating people who are awaiting due process for asylum, and holding human beings in intolerable conditions without regard for their basic needs. We must stand united in upholding the dignity of all human beings. The soul of our nation is at stake.

Recently, Pope Francis wrote a message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. He offers valuable insight into this issue. He wrote, “***It is not just about migrants: it is also about our fears.*** The signs of meanness we see around us heighten “our fear of ‘the other’, the unknown, the marginalized, the foreigner... We see this with the arrival of migrants and refugees knocking on our door in search of protection, security and a better future. . . . The problem is when [doubts and fears] condition our way of thinking and acting to the point of making us intolerant, closed and perhaps even – without realizing it – racist. In this way, fear deprives us of the desire and the ability to encounter the other, the person different from myself; it deprives me of an opportunity to encounter the Lord.”

“***It is not just about migrants: it is about charity.*** Through works of charity, we demonstrate our faith (James 2:18). And the highest form of charity is that shown to those unable to reciprocate and perhaps even to thank us in return.”

“But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight” (Lk 10:33). “***It is not just about migrants: it is about our humanity.*** . . . Compassion strikes the most sensitive chords of our humanity, releasing a vibrant urge to “be a neighbor” to all those whom we see in difficulty. Being compassionate means recognizing the suffering of the other and taking immediate action to soothe, heal and save. To be compassionate means to make room for that tenderness which today’s society so often asks us to repress.”

I encourage all people of good will to express their opposition to this proposal by signing petitions, and by writing letters to the Uinta County Commissioners or to the five elected officials of the State of Wyoming. Also, I encourage them to support the *Fiestas de Familias* around the state, especially in Evanston on August 18, 2019, at 3:00 PM at Hamblin Park.

Sincerely,

Steven Biegler

Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Cheyenne