

Guest Columns

Compassion for asylees lost in border debate

By James Gannon / Ceo, Catholic Charities

Tuesday, May 7th, 2019 at 12:02am

Something's gotta give, really?

I read the Albuquerque Journal's (April 28) editorial on the crisis at our border referencing that New Mexicans and our communities extending helping hands of compassion and kindness. It is interesting that persons of faith who practice their beliefs and follow scripture through their actions are considered "well-intentioned" but somehow inappropriate.

Also interesting, but not surprising, is that while Journal editors were shaping the final drafts of this editorial, our president was taking credit on Twitter for the manufacturing and "sending" of the families seeking asylum to sanctuary cities, especially San Francisco. Neither the Journal nor the president mentioned that these so-called "undocumented" were following established U.S. and international law in making their claims of asylum as they attempt to escape death, persecution and a life centered in fear. In fact, many who came with documentation of why they were asking for asylum watched as U.S. immigration officials simply tossed them aside and the contents of their backpacks in the trash. Nor does the Journal report on the dehydration and hunger because of not being given water or something to eat besides cereal bars for multiple days while in custody after detainment by U.S. officials.

The flood of families that the Journal and others speak of is being facilitated by an administration that has for all practical purposes closed or drastically reduced migration via other legal means including our refugee resettlement programs, leaving only the crossing of our borders with Mexico or Canada. Reports are that as many as 60 different nationalities with families and individuals from the Caribbean, South America, Africa and Asia are making their way to America via our border with Mexico. A trickling of those families can access the ports of entry to make claim. While not by choice but necessity, the rest must take the more difficult process of following U.S./international laws or treaties and step over the border in remote areas to make their claim of asylum. The families are systematically being released by our federal government into our border cities or bused and released in other cities without resources.

If given other means that were less risky, less expensive and more readily available in their home countries, at our consulates and ports of entry, those means would be used. These families have left their possessions, traveled over 1,800 miles and gambled all on a 10% chance of a better life rather than face persecution and certain death of not only themselves but also their children. How different is their logic to the logic taken by a handful of colonists when they challenged the most powerful nation on the earth in 1776?

The request for \$250,000 is not to aid "undocumented families" as the Journal would like us to think. It is to aid and support the efforts of hundreds of our fellow citizens here in Albuquerque who chose to step up and fill the void left by our federal government in the compassionate treatment of those who petition to join the long line of immigrants that have built this country. Further, the \$250,000 is a commitment by our local authorities of support to the thousands and thousands of Albuquerqueans and New Mexicans who are supporting the volunteers – their neighbors – who believe in our nation. Our community has an obligation to demonstrate at our core that we are a compassionate and caring society, built on laws of fairness, and extend hope to the world.

Yes, something's gotta give, and it is not the spirit of our nation.
