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STATEMENT ON UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS

The Louisiana Conference of Catholic Bishops (LCCB) acknowledges the humanitarian crisis surrounding unaccompanied refugee minors who have entered our country from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. We must address this reality with a spirit that honors the sanctity of the family and works to protect the vulnerable.

Our Catholic faith calls us to be compassionate to all as a concrete way of respecting the life and dignity of the human person. Such an approach is not conditioned upon one's immigration status or nationality. In fact, Jesus *Himself* was a refugee and therefore in seeing these refugee children today we are presented with a tangible opportunity to see the face of Christ. Catholic teaching affirms that it is in the face of the immigrant, the refugee, the asylum-seeker, and the trafficking victim that we see the face of Christ. Jesus definitely states, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me," as a means to teach how we are to give of ourselves for the sake of the most vulnerable (Mt. 25:35). In a pertinent reflection on how we are to welcome children, Jesus proclaims: "Whoever receives a child such as this in my name receives me." (Mt. 18:5).

This tragic situation is yet another opportunity to affirm and work toward comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform. Such reform affirms the right of our nation to secure our borders and enforce immigration laws. However, Catholic Teaching equally affirms that all people have the right to conditions worthy of human life. These would include the opportunity to live in a homeland where one's life and the lives of his loved ones are protected as opposed to consistently threatened. Children who are fleeing violence and seeking safety with family members who are already

within our country should be given primary consideration and due process under the law as a way to ensure their well-being. Similarly, individuals should have access to freedom and the opportunity to live a life of fulfillment as God has designed for each of us.

We urge all policymakers to avoid using inhumane language and from making unsubstantiated claims as this crisis unfolds. We must not forget that many of these individuals are young and fearful children and mothers who have responded to their own impossible and unique realities by migrating thousands of miles to our nation, risking their own lives to do so. It is the prophetic call of the Gospel which demands that we treat them with dignity and compassion.

We pray for the safety of those individuals involved, as well as a resolution to this humanitarian crisis that is both just and moral.

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