

Church officials respond to recent arrests of immigrants in Maryland, proposal to reduce number of refugees

The day after Pope Francis initiated a worldwide initiative to promote welcome and acceptance of immigrants and refugees, the United States federal government announced the arrests of nearly 500 individuals, including at least 28 people living in Baltimore and elsewhere in Maryland who were reportedly detained on civil immigration violations, not criminal charges.

One day earlier, the Trump Administration announced a sharp reduction in the number of refugees for admittance into the United States. The Presidential Determination for Refugees Admissions is the lowest since the founding of the program in 1980 and marks the second consecutive year that the new Administration has reduced the number.

Bishop Mark E. Brennan, Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar for Hispanics for the Archdiocese of Baltimore and William J. McCarthy, Jr., Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Baltimore, denounced both actions by the U.S. government.

“Both measures have real consequences for the individuals and families affected, including innocent children. The United States is a nation of immigrants. Instead of following the welcoming example of Pope Francis, our government is turning its back on those who seek safety, freedom and economic stability for themselves and their families and is instead returning them to their homelands and the wars,

persecution and poverty that awaits them,” Bishop Brennan and Mr. McCarthy said.

The Esperanza Center, a program of Catholic Charities in Baltimore, provides free services to area immigrants, including help with legal and immigration-related issues.

“We stand ready to assist our immigrant sisters and brothers as we respond to Pope Francis’ call to ‘reach out, open your arms to migrants and refugees,’” Mr. McCarthy said.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, in a statement last week, said, “Each refugee that comes to the United States is admitted through an extensive vetting system. Many of these refugees already have family in the United States, and most begin working immediately to rebuild their lives...God has blessed our country with bounty and precious liberty, and so we have great capacity to welcome those in such desperate need, while ensuring our nation’s security.”

Of the proposed reduction in refugees permitted into the United States, Bishop Brennan added, “Our country has historically been a refuge for those fleeing violence, war and religious and political persecution. To reduce so drastically the number of refugees admitted to our country is contrary to America’s longstanding role of welcoming such people.”

###