Missionary Society of St. Columban Affirms Sanctuary for Migrants and Refugees

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December 12, 2016, Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. During this season of Advent and Christmas, we anticipate with joy and hope the birth of Jesus Christ into the world, and prepare our hearts to welcome those in whom He promised to be present: the hungry and thirsty, the stranger and the naked, the prisoner and the sick (Mt 25:31-46). Today’s celebration recalls how Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, reached out to a poor, indigenous member of Mexico’s society in his own language, and offered him the sanctuary of her protection and support at the hill of Tepeyac.

As missionary disciples of Jesus Christ, the Missionary Society of St. Columban is committed to welcoming and providing sanctuary for migrants and refugees, especially in the face of the increasing deportations of immigrants and refugees fleeing violence and seeking asylum in the United States, and the growing problem of their inhumane treatment in detention centers.

Pope Francis has called on Catholics to welcome migrants and refugees and bear witness to God’s mercy and compassion: “The tragedy of forced migration and displacement affects millions, and is fundamentally a crisis of humanity, calling for a response of solidarity, compassion, generosity and an immediate practical commitment of resources.” Inspired by Pope Francis, the Missionary Society of St. Columban affirms its commitment to the biblical witness of sanctuary as a matter of religious freedom, and pledges to provide protection for vulnerable populations whose human rights are violated and whose lives are in danger.

According to the **Rev. Timothy Mulroy, Director of the U.S. Region of the Missionary Society of St. Columban**, "We Columbans have a long history of caring for migrants and refugees as part of our missionary identity. The biblical witness of sanctuary is one that we put into practice through our mission centers, welcoming migrants and refugees fleeing violence, religious persecution, extreme poverty, and the impact of climate change. Christian churches have always been places of refuge, and St. Columban, our patron saint and founder of many monasteries in Europe, was an early practitioner of that tradition."

**Rev. Bob Mosher, Director of the Columban Mission Center in El Paso TX**, affirmed: "Many of the migrants and refugees among us are facing death in the event of a return to their countries. The violence in these countries is directly related to U.S. political and economic policies, and in many cases committed by criminal organizations financed by drug sales to the United States and sustained with weapons bought through third parties in the U.S. Offering sanctuary begins to counter the situation and to awaken our consciousness to the root causes of the flight of thousands to our land."

**Scott Wright, Director of the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach in Washington DC** added: "We are encouraged by the response of many faith communities to stand with immigrants and refugees and to uphold their human dignity and their human rights. The church has always provided sanctuary for migrants and refugees, and we will continue to do so."

Columbans serve the poor and vulnerable in 15 countries around the world, with mission centers to welcome migrants, refugees, victims of human trafficking and other vulnerable populations in the Philippines, Taiwan, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.