

Children of the Drug Wars

There has been much publicity about the unaccompanied children coming over our borders. Many see this as South American Immigrants streaming in illegally. This year as many as 90,000 children are expected to be picked up. Many, are from Honduras and Guatemala. The majority of these children are fleeing not poverty, but violence. As a result what the U.S. is seeing on its borders now is not an immigration crisis; it is a refugee crisis.

According to the 1951 U. N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: a refugee is someone who has left his or her country of origin because of well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

As the U.S. and Columbia spent billions of dollars to disrupt the movement of drugs up the Caribbean Corridor, traffickers rerouted inland through Honduras and Guatemala. Narco Groups and gangs have taken over neighborhoods, schools and entire communities. Children live in fear for their lives if they resist recruitment into the drug trade. The stories are unimaginable. The violence, death, total dehumanization and conscription into short, brutal lives that these children endure is unthinkable. This is a major humanitarian crisis.

To permanently stem this flow of children we must address the complex root causes of violence in Honduras and Guatemala as well as the demand for illegal drugs in the U. S. that is fueling that violence. In the meantime, we must recognize this as a refugee crisis.

As a community of Faith and Compassion, we need to be deeply concerned about these vulnerable children refugees. With this in mind, the community of St. Paul's has chosen to work with these children and their host families that have arrived in Norwalk through our "Doing Lent Differently" Initiative.

Currently the Norwalk Public School system has over 90 of these displaced children in our school system. To address the needs of these children, Norwalk has set up a "Norwalk International Academy" at each of the high schools. These centers serve as welcome centers specifically for the high school age children that have arrived. Currently there are 18 students at Norwalk High School and 18 at Brian McMahon High School. We are working with the school system to help meet the needs of these children. We will collect needed school supplies, clothing, toiletries, food and other needed items for the newly landed refugee children and their host families. We are also recruiting tutors to help in the welcome centers. English, General Math. And general knowledge skills are needed. One does not need Spanish skills to do this. Opportunities to tutor during the school day and after school are available. Sign up after mass at St. Paul's Central. Mentoring opportunities are available as well. Training will be provided. Donated items can be brought to St. Paul's central where a table is set up to receive them.. More information is available at: maryverel@gmail.com.

We can make a difference in our own community! This is a wonderful opportunity to reach out extend our "radical welcome" to our global brothers and sisters right here in our own back yard.