

Hispanic evangelical group offers churches' help in housing migrant children

The National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference is launching a campaign to offer aid to immigrant children held in detention centers at the border.

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This article appears in the [July 31, 2019](#) issue.

The head of the largest Hispanic evangelical Christian network in the United States has offered to work with the Trump administration to provide resources and shelter to migrant children crossing the US-Mexico border.

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, said during a conference call July 1 that his organization is launching a campaign to offer aid to immigrant children held in detention centers at the border.

It will involve sending “shipments and cargo and truckloads of resources to the border,” including shoes, clothing, and hygiene products, Rodriguez said, “working with our current administration in addressing some of the needs of these children coming over.”

The Kairos Company, the communications firm that organized the conference call, said churches participating in the program plan to offer housing to children who would otherwise end up in detention centers but noted they have not yet secured approval from the US government to do so. It was not immediately clear how many—or which—children the group might be able to take in and whether they

would be in homes as well as churches.

Churches will provide necessities and open their buildings “just in case the detention centers cannot hold the children or their families,” a spokesperson wrote in an email. “The church becomes a temporary housing facility for those seeking asylum or coming over the border undocumented and [who] were captured in the process.”

The spokesperson also noted that the initiative will be led by the NHCLC but is not limited to its network.

Representatives of the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Health and Human Services did not comment on the potential program.

Rodriguez and a delegation of pastors from the NHCLC visited a detention facility in late June in El Paso, Texas, and reported that no one was sleeping on floors or cement, and storage areas were full of clothing and hygiene products. Rodriguez said guards emphatically told him they had not altered the center for the visit, but he acknowledged he was not allowed to speak with the children during the hour-long visit.

One issue preventing churches and faith-based agencies from helping asylum seekers is the administration’s so-called Remain in Mexico program, which is sending asylum seekers back over the border to Mexico while they wait for their cases to be heard in US immigration court, according to Matthew Soerens, US director of church mobilization for World Relief and national coordinator of the Evangelical Immigration Table, of which the NHCLC is a member.

Another issue is that the US Department of Health and Human Services has run out of resources to place children with agencies like Bethany Christian Services that are authorized to provide foster care for children until they can be reunited with family, Soerens said.

Churches need government approval and oversight to take in children. Not just anyone can show up and offer to foster a migrant child who has been separated from his or her family at the border, and that’s “for good reason,” Soerens said. “You have to protect children.” —Religion News Service

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “Hispanic evangelical group offers churches’ help in housing migrant children.”