

## **Statement in Support of Annunciation House**

February 23, 2024

The four branches of the Maryknoll family are all committed to the dignity of each human being and to living the teachings of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with compassion and justice for all. As the leadership of Maryknoll missionaries working in many parts of the world to provide a dignified welcome to people in situations of vulnerability and marginalization, including people seeking safety, we express our solidarity with and support for Annunciation House following the recently declared intent of the Texas Attorney General to end the organization's critical mission.

For more than 45 years, Annunciation House has offered hospitality to thousands of migrants in El Paso, Texas, a border town situated at the heart of the complex and broken U.S. immigration system. We see on the U.S.-Mexico border decades of neglect by the U.S. government to provide a safe, orderly and humane migration process, and now increasingly aggressive responses by the state of Texas that not only punish migrants for the simple act of seeking safety but also target those who offer aid as a response of faith. We assert, as Pope Francis said more than ten years ago, "Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more." As a nation, we can do better, and examples of acts of compassion and respect for human life are a strength, not a weakness to be eliminated.

Maryknoll missionaries have served as volunteers at some of the shelters operated by Annunciation House, where, in coordination with the U.S. Border Patrol and ICE, along with community partners, migrants can find food, clothing and shelter as they prepare to leave El Paso on the next leg of their journey. Rooted in the teachings of Jesus to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable among us, and specifically, to welcome the stranger, we believe that the mission of Annunciation House, as expressed by its founder Ruben Garcia, exemplifies our Christian commitment to love one another, and makes our society stronger.

Together with Bishop Mark Seitz who described the work of Annunciation House as "an example of our Catholic commitment to the poor, the Christian call to love one's neighbor, and stepping into the breach to take action where many will not," we acknowledge a deep debt of gratitude to Annunciation House. We stand with Annunciation House staff and volunteers as they face this unjust attempt to criminalize their crucial service.

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