



The Episcopal Diocese of Texas
Office of the Bishop

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

~**Leviticus 19:33-34 English Standard Version 2016 (ESV)**

To be human, and therefore to act accordingly, confessing both the need of assistance and the willingness to render it, is supremely natural and not unnatural. It is the most obvious thing to do, whereas the opposite is by far the most artificial.

~**Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics**

In our finest hours, though, the soul of the country manifests itself in an inclination to open our arms rather than to clench our fists...

~**Jon Meacham, The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels**

Attorney General Paxton's actions against Annunciation House in El Paso should make all Christians very nervous about the values and focus of the Attorney General's office at this time. The scripture, our theological history, and our nation's history are all filled with examples of our very best angels who discover God through their work to care for those in need. Jesus tells us when we serve those in need we are serving him. (Matthew 25).

Paxton's most recent action is a legal attack on Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas. This action is an alarm for religious leaders of every denomination and faith tradition across Texas. Paxton absurdly claims without proof that the Catholic non-profit organization is illegally "smuggling" undocumented immigrants. This is because Annunciation House simply provides food, shelter, and advice on how to legally apply for asylum. Moreover, St. Christopher's Episcopal in El Paso is part of the Annunciation House network of shelters that work in concert with the Federal Government to provide shelter for legal asylum seekers who have been allowed into the country by the US Government.

Baptized Christians in our own Diocese of Texas have connections to Annunciation House and St. Christopher's. Our people have gone to help and serve those in need through these ministries.

Dedicated volunteers who staff Annunciation House, along with our parishioners, have put into practice their Christian belief and message of Jesus, attending to the severe physical needs of migrants coming into the country without regard to their status, just as Jesus attended to people without regard to their status. Their firm faith in that message, and their rigorous application of the Gospel is inspiring. Their work over the years, since 1978, has been awesome and inspirational, assisting thousands of hungry and unsheltered people.

Paxton's attempt to shut down Annunciation House is a transparent, political operation that victimizes all Christians who serve, and those whom they serve.

Paxton, as Attorney General, has ferociously asserted the religious rights of organizations and churches. But in this matter, he has a different frame of mind. Apparently, he feels he can decide which religious freedoms the state will support, and which it will not. That kind of discretion is the end of religious freedom, in this case. It's the death knell for a gospel that has proclaimed that we become close to God when we serve those whom God loves – the poor, the sick, the stranger in a strange land. Jesus beckons, "If you love me, feed my sheep." (John 21:15)

There is also a practical element to this, and it is easy to understand: El Paso is struggling to meet the reality of the influx of migrants coming across the border, and Annunciation House is helping with that. They are doing just what we as Christians are called to do. As its director Rubén García notes, it helps serve local businesses, the city, and immigration officials to keep people off the streets and ensure their shelter while they pass through the community.

Christian ministry in our cities is essential to caring beyond our civil services. This is also true for those synagogues and mosques that partner as an interfaith safety net for those in need.

Episcopalians affirm the historic Christian's view to provide fellow human beings ("fellow children of God," in religious language) food, shelter, and essential necessities. We assert our religious right to do so – even against the powers of the world.

Secretary General Paxton's work is, indeed, to assist us in good governance. I am for safe borders, and the reform of our immigration system. However, Paxton's role as Attorney General is not to keep Christians from serving people in need.

All people of faith need to rally against Paxton's attack on the religious practice of offering shelter, food, and medical care to all of God's people.

We can pray for Paxton's conversion in this instance. More importantly, as a group of religious leaders and people of various faith traditions, we need to unite to support Annunciation House and St. Christopher's in El Paso.

Finally, we need to join with our faith family in El Paso and make clear this is a very dangerous precedent. Attorney General Ken Paxton's attack is a perilous encroachment on people's religious beliefs and mission in this life as we practice the work for the life to come. As the bishop of the Diocese of Texas, I reaffirm our Episcopal and historic Christian stance that we – the religious are given authority by God to feed, clothe, house, and care for those in need.



C. Andrew Doyle
Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Texas

Please see the below for news about the action by the Attorney General of Texas.

<https://youtu.be/0Et5Jw-yx3s?si=uPJvxHC96czecJhc>

<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2024/02/23/bishop-seitz-annunciation-house-border-ken-paxton-247373>

<https://youtu.be/gxPD-usNNp0?si=nvrtW9TOJs8ApNDI>