News



The Rev. Noel Andersen, of Church World Service in Washington, leads a group in prayer in front of the White House Aug. 2. Participants, who included Catholics, called on President Donald Trump to protect the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA. It faces an uncertain future under Trump. (CNS/Rhina Guidos)



by Jenn Morson

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @jennmorson

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

August 31, 2017
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Shortly after President Donald Trump pardoned Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio, the controversial law man who was found guilty of criminal contempt of court for defying a federal order, an old photograph began circulating in social media that supposedly linked the sheriff to the local Catholic bishop.

The photograph shows Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted standing alongside of Arpaio, who is Catholic, in the sheriff's tent city jail. News accounts in 2009 said Olmsted had given Arpaio permission to use the photo in his re-election campaign materials, an allegation the Phoenix diocese denied then — and is denying again.

"In no uncertain terms did Bishop Olmsted ever grant permission for his photograph to be used in Mr. Arpaio's re-election material," Robert DeFrancesco, communications director for the Phoenix Diocese told NCR Aug. 29. "Despite these allegations, we are fairly certain this never happened, and if it did, it was something we were completely unaware of and done without Bishop Olmsted's knowledge or consent."

Advertisement



Phoenix Bishop Thomas Olmsted at St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Avondale, Arizona, Nov. 6 (CNS/Nancy Wiechec)

According to DeFrancesco, Olmsted had posed for an impromptu picture on his way out of the tent city after ministering to prisoners and celebrating Mass for them.

Olmsted did not issue a public statement about Arpaio's pardon, but DeFrancesco released a statement from Olmsted to NCR: "The news of last week's presidential pardon should compel us to reflect on immigrants and their families, who may have committed far less serious offenses than those attributed to Mr. Arpaio. Our immigrant brothers and sisters, including Dreamers and others, are truly the ones who are deserving of mercy and compassion from our government and must not be forgotten, especially at this time."

Read this next: Catholic leaders get personal over threat to DACA

Olmsted, like many Catholics bishops across the country, has been outspoken against anti-immigration sentiment and for immigration reform. In December, on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, he issued a pastoral letter, "You Welcomed Me," which addressed the increasing hostility against undocumented immigrants in his diocese. He regularly cosigns statements from Arizona's other bishops and from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop's statements on immigration reform.

The only American prelate to respond to Arpaio's pardon directly in a public statement was retired Los Angeles Archbishop Cardinal Roger Mahony, who posted to his blog that he is "deeply troubled and disgusted by President Trump's pardon of Joe Arapaio. … The former sheriff's tenure was marked by racial profiling, harassment of our Latino brothers and sisters, and the disruption of immigrant communities. He created fear and terror among so many immigrants, and not just in Arizona. Children here in California were afraid to go to school because of what they heard from Phoenix."

> The president has pardon Sheriff Arpaio. Congress should "pardon" irregular immigrants by passing comprehensive immigration reform.. pic.twitter.com/r0zYVfH8j8
>
> — Thomas Wenski (@ThomasWenski) August 28, 2017

Mahony also said he was "troubled that the president may remove protections from young immigrants who qualify for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program," and he urged, "May all Catholics and people of good will raise their voices and stand up for our immigrant brothers and sisters during this difficult period in their lives and in the life of our country."

Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski tweeted about the pardon Aug. 28: "The president has pardon Sheriff Arpaio. Congress should "pardon" irregular immigrants by passing comprehensive immigration reform."

Later in an interview with America magazine, Wenski asked, "If Arpaio can be pardoned, why can't the irregular immigrants be pardoned?"

He noted that opponents of extending amnesty-like programs to the estimated 11 million undocumented people living in the United States often point out that they broke the law by entering the country and therefore should be treated as criminals. "What's good for the goose is good for the gander," Wenski said.

[Jenn Morson is a freelance writer living and working outside of Washington, D.C., with her husband and their four children. You can follow her on Twitter and Facebook .]