Vatican



Pope Francis meets refugees at the Moria refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, Greece, in April 2016. (CNS file photo/Paul Haring)



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Pope Francis has backed the U.S. bishops in their criticism of President Donald Trump’s policy of separating migrant children from their parents at the Mexican border, saying in a new interview that he wishes to echo their judgment that the practice is immoral.

Speaking to the Reuters news agency about the Trump administration policy, the pontiff said simply: "I am on the side of the bishops’ conference."

"It's not easy, but populism is not the solution," said the pope. "Let it be clear that in these things, I respect (the position of) the bishops conference."

Hundreds of religious denominations and groups in the U.S. have criticized the Trump administration policy, which is directing border police to separate migrant children from their parents after they cross into the U.S. from Mexico and to place the minors into detention facilities.

Galveston-Houston Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, the president of the U.S. bishops' conference, said in a statement June 13 that while the country has a right to protect its borders "separating babies from their mothers is not the answer and is immoral."

Francis also spoke in the interview about migrants arriving in Italy, where a new populist government has refused to allow ships rescuing migrants stranded on the Mediterranean access to ports in the country.

One ship was forced to spend several extra days at sea in the summer sun to reach Spain, where it off-loaded more than 600 migrants.

"I believe that you cannot reject people who arrive," said the pope. "You have to receive them, help them, look after them, accompany them and then see where to put them, but throughout all of Europe."

"Some governments are working on it, and people have to be settled in the best possible way, but creating psychosis is not the cure," he continued. "Populism does not resolve things. What resolves things is acceptance, study, prudence."

Among other issues Francis touched on in the interview was criticism he has received from inside the church. The pope said he had heard about a 2016 letter from four cardinals questioning his understanding of the church's family life

teachings.

U.S. Cardinal Raymond Burke was one of the signatories of the so-called 'dubia letter.' Francis said the publication of the letter was "a way of doing things that is, let's say, not ecclesial, but we all make mistakes."

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