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Children carry empty water containers inside a migrant encampment in Matamoros, Mexico, Feb. 18, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Daniel Becerril)

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In the coming days and weeks, border communities like El Paso, Texas, will once again begin providing hospitality to asylum seekers for the first time in two years.

In that time, the Migrant Protection Protocols, more commonly known as the "Remain in Mexico" policy, have forced asylum seeking families and individuals to navigate a punitive immigration system from situations of insecurity in northern Mexico.

President Joe Biden has rightly eliminated the program.

In the wake of the damage done by Remain in Mexico, we (Bishop Seitz and Hope Border Institute) formed the Border Refugee Assistance Fund to provide critical humanitarian assistance to refugees in our sister city of Ciudad Júarez. Tens of thousands of migrants have been returned there by Remain in Mexico as well as by policies that still remain in place, like Title 42, a pandemic-related measure by which asylum seekers are also forcibly returned without recourse to Mexico and other countries.

The assistance fund has supported the work of many migrant shelters operated by faith communities. We have also been able to provide COVID-19 testing and treatment for migrants during this time of pandemic. Through the fund we have been able to walk with brave women and families, for whom not even the most desperate circumstances could eliminate hope and openness to new life — the fund has supported the needs of over 150 pregnant women and new mothers with comprehensive maternal health care, counseling and pediatric visits.

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As people of faith who minister to migrants at the border, we have seen first-hand how fear of the other, fueled by racism and a politics of exclusion, enabled us to turn our back on the most vulnerable searching for mercy at our nation's doorstep. In our frenzy to build walls, we have constructed borders of rivalry and polarization between neighbors throughout the country.

The opportunity before us now is to reject once and for all policies and practices that demonize people on the margins of our society, including migrants. Policies that militarize and criminalize, while they may have short-term political purchase, are never stable or dignified solutions to address social problems, be they poverty, racial inequality or immigration.

We welcome President Biden's recent actions that begin to reverse the damage done at our border, as well as his bold proposals for immigration reform.



Migrants are detained by a U.S. Border Patrol agent in El Paso, Texas, Feb. 9, 2021, as they turn themselves in to request asylum. (CNS/Reuters/Jose Luis Gonzalez)

And we must do more. We must renew our asylum laws to reflect the drivers of forced displacement today and protect those who fall into global protection gaps, such as those forced to flee by climate change. We must ensure protections for women fleeing violence in a way that no future administration can reverse and that all women are given real supports so that the false choice of abortion is unthinkable. And we must guarantee protections for the many Central Americans who in recent years came to our border seeking safety from a toxic cocktail of political insecurity, drought, hunger and widespread violence.

Above all, we must change how we, as a country, view migrants. In our work every day with people on the move, we know that those who arrive at our border seeking safety and a better life are not a threat, but instead offer us a holy invitation to recognize our interconnectedness as a human family and to respond with compassion and solidarity.

As Pope Francis writes in his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*: "Will we bend down to touch and heal the wounds of others? Will we bend down and help another to get up? This is today's challenge, and we should not be afraid to face it."