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Migrants seeking asylum in the U.S. walk into a temporary humanitarian respite center run by Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in McAllen, Texas, April 8. (CNS/Reuters/Go Nakamura)

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July 28, 2021

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Texas Gov. Greg Abbott is not shy about his support for religious liberty. When the city of San Antonio proposed civil rights protections for the LGBT community, his campaign website sponsored a page where voters could register their objections because the "ordinance would not prevent discrimination; it would impose it by stifling speech, repressing religious liberty and imposing burdens on those who hold a traditional view on human relations."

On National Religious Freedom Day, he tweeted, "Our country was founded on religious liberty, and I will always protect our first freedom as Americans, and as Texans."

Just last month, he signed into law the "Freedom to Worship Act," which prevents any public official from trying to close a house of worship for any reason, including to abide by public health regulations.

Abbott has shown himself to be a principled champion of religious liberty — that is, until that value conflicted with his desire to appear tough on immigration, the better to curry favor with former President Donald Trump and his nativist followers.

Last month, Abbott issued an executive order that would strip any shelter that serves migrants of its license to operate. There are currently some 4,500 unaccompanied minors being served at Texas shelters, and Abbott has made no provision to find alternate housing, claiming it is the federal government's job to do so.

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Among the shelters threatened with closure are those operated by Catholic Charities, including the Humanitarian Respite Center run by Missionaries of Jesus Sr. Norma Pimentel, whose work has been praised by President Joe Biden and Pope Francis. There, she helps restore the dignity of the scared, poor and desperate people who have fled the violence of their homelands in order to come to the United States.

In an op-ed in the Dallas Morning News, Bishops Edward Burns of Dallas and Mark Seitz of El Paso called the governor's action a violation of religious liberty. "Motivated by our faith, Catholic Charities provides food, clothing and shelter to

these children, following Jesus' command to care for orphans and widows in their distress, to welcome the stranger and to care for those who suffer. But this work is now in peril," they wrote.

"The state of Texas has an opportunity to protect children and live up to its commitment to religious freedom," the bishops continued. "Doing this helps both unaccompanied minors and Texas-born foster children. It also follows state laws that were put in place to protect the religious freedom and conscience rights of those who care for children."

We concur. There is a principled position that holds religious liberty is a virtually unfettered right. We do not share that view and such a libertarian understanding of religious liberty is not what the Second Vatican Council endorsed. Still, we could respect Abbott's stance if it were consistent. Instead, he invokes religious liberty when it suits him and discards it when it requires a result he does not like. That is not principled; it is hypocrisy.

We stand in solidarity with Pimentel, with the bishops of Texas and, most of all, with the immigrants — and other children — who will be harmed by Abbott's executive order.

A version of this story appeared in the **Aug 6-19, 2021** print issue under the headline: Threatening Catholic migrant shelters threatens religious liberty.