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Sr. Norma Pimentel, director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, speaks with a young resident of a tent camp housing some 2,500 asylum-seekers in Matamoros, Mexico, Feb. 29, 2020. (CNS/David Agren)

by NCR Editorial Staff

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"By their fruits you will know them," Matthew records it from the Sermon on the Mount.

By their fruits.

What fruit exactly is born from suing for the records of a Catholic sister who is giving quite literally lifesaving assistance at the U.S.-Mexico border — doing hard, thankless work, day in, day out, with little earthly reward?

What fruit exactly is born from likewise smearing the laudable work of a Catholic agency that helps refugees arriving at the border after they have been processed and released by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement?

Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley and Missionary of Jesus Sr. Norma Pimentel, its director, assist some 80-200 refugees a day, providing, as their website says, "a warm meal and water, hygiene products and a warm shower." The fruit of what they do is seen especially in the faces of the children they make smile.

Full stop: They are modern-day heroes, maybe even one day saints, and should be applauded, thanked and then supported in their work.

But, of course, the conservative nonprofit group CatholicVote says it sees in what they do nothing but a plan to cause "chaos" at the border. Earlier in the month, they sued the White House for supposed communications between the Biden administration and these nefarious do-gooders.



In this 2018 file photo, Sr. Norma Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, prays with a girl at Our Lady of San Juan National Shrine Basilica Hotel in McAllen, Texas. The child had been separated from her family. (CNS/Global Sisters Report/Courtesy of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley)

Beyond any doubt, their effort is meant to do nothing more than cause a nuisance, besmirching the reputations of good people in an exhausted effort to score a point in the never-ending culture war. That it comes from a group known for harvesting cellphone data from churchgoers, and which only months ago openly thanked former President Donald Trump for his work "on behalf of Catholics," makes the ill intention impossible to mask.

Thankfully, a broad range of prominent Catholic voices have already stood up to denounce the cynical ploy. Even more thankfully, Pimentel's ordinary, Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, is among those rising to the occasion, telling NCR that CatholicVote has framed Pimentel and Catholic Charities' work "in a distorted way."

"I commend the work Sister Norma Pimentel, her staff and volunteers are doing to help those in need of care in our community, including immigrants," said Flores. "It is with great care and responsibility that Catholic Charities RGV utilizes all donations and funds given to assist in the humanitarian care of those suffering in the community."

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We are living through a wrenchingly terrible time of division and conflict in our country. It is hard to describe how sad it is that those divisions and conflicts now mar even the church's most basic, fundamental work. As if acts of compassion and decency could ever be wrong.

Some 20 chapters after the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew records the vision of the judgment of the nations. In the great separation, those blessed to be with God will be those who gave food to the hungry, water to the thirsty and welcome to the stranger.

We would all do well to remember.

There is no mention of those who file nuisance lawsuits.

Related: Conservative group's lawsuit over Catholic border ministry draws criticism
A version of this story appeared in the **March 4-17, 2022** print issue under the headline: CatholicVote's attack on Pimentel is a cynical ploy.