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Pope Francis ?deeply moved? by letters from young U.S. prisoners

Josephine McKenna Religion News Service | Jun. 4, 2014 The Francis Chronicles
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Pope Francis has been ?deeply moved? by 500 letters he received from young U.S. prisoners facing life behind bars and promised to pray for them.

According to the U.S. Jesuit weekly magazine America, the letters were sent to Francis by the Rev. Michael Kennedy, executive director of the Jesuit Restorative Justice Initiative, in southern California.

?I have read the letters which you kindly sent to me from hundreds of young people from the United States sentenced as juveniles to life imprisonment without parole,? Francis said in a letter to Kennedy published in the magazine.

?Their stories and their plea that this form of sentencing be reviewed in the light of justice and the possibility of reform and rehabilitation, moved me deeply.?

The Argentinian pope, who is also a Jesuit, made headlines around the world when he washed the feet of 12 prisoners at a Rome jail to mark Holy Thursday soon after his historic election in 2013. In his May 7 letter to Kennedy, Francis said he would pray for the inmates and also asked them to pray for him.

Kennedy, who is a vigorous social campaigner, said the U.S. is the only country in the world that gives life imprisonment without parole to juveniles aged between 14 and 17. He believes they deserve to be treated differently than adults.

In states with life in prison without parole, ?these children face the fact that they may never be with their families again,? Kennedy wrote on America?s website on May 28.

?The pope?s letter is strong and clear. He believes our youth deserve a second chance.?

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