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Opinion: Catholic Church will not be intimidated by Ken Paxton's threats to Annunciation House, Bishop Seitz says

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El Paso Catholic Bishop Mark Seitz talked with migrants on May 9, 2023, in South El Paso. (Cindy Ramirez/El Paso Matters)

By The Most Rev. Mark J. Seitz

For generations, El Paso has worked hard to build a resilient and welcoming borderland community, a place of welcome and dignity.

Today, however, we find ourselves in an impossible position, hemmed in on all sides. On the one hand, we are challenged by serious federal neglect to provide a safe, orderly and humane response to migration at our southern border. On the other hand, we are now witnessing an escalating campaign of intimidation, fear and dehumanization in the state of Texas, one characterized by barbed wire, harsh new laws penalizing the act of seeking safety at our border, and the targeting of those who would offer aid as a response of faith.

For more than 45 years, Annunciation House has been an effective, compassionate local response to a complex and broken immigration system. Rooted in the Gospel, and born of an encounter between Ruben Garcia and Mother Teresa of Kolkata, it has led our community effort to meet the challenge of migration in recent years. Its work is nourished by long-standing partnerships with the Catholic Church in El Paso, our local government, and our federal law enforcement partners, including U.S. Border Patrol.

Its work is an example of our Catholic commitment to the poor, the Christian call to love one's neighbor, and stepping into the breach to take action where many will not. Our church, our city and our country owe Annunciation House a deep debt of gratitude.

This is not about politics. I know the guests at Annunciation House, those trapped on the other side of the border, and those who have died trying to cross it. I have encountered them and have experienced their pain, suffering and hope. This is about their lives and our shared human dignity.

Our community's actions in this moment, the decisions that we make, and the response that we offer today, will be judged by whether or not we rise to that standard.

Let me be clear. For the church's part, we will endeavor to work with all in pursuit of the common good of our city and nation. We will vigorously defend the freedom of people of faith and goodwill to put deeply held religious convictions into practice. We will not be intimidated in our work to serve Jesus Christ in our sisters and brothers fleeing danger and seeking to keep their families together.

We will stand in solidarity with our community's aid workers and volunteers, with our community non-profits assisting migrants, as well as with all those in the borderlands and throughout our state living under the weight of inhumane immigration policies.

As one El Paso community, this is our promise today. We will not surrender the identity of our borderlands, a place which chooses compassion over indifference, human fraternity over division, and radical hope and evangelical love over hatred and exclusion.

The Most Rev. Mark J. Seitz is bishop of the El Paso Catholic Diocese.