

## Groups respond to immigration 'disaster'

BY ERIN MURPHY TH STAFF WRITER EMURPHY@WCINET.COM | Posted: Saturday, August 23, 2014 12:00 am

Local religious organizations continue to discuss ways to help Central American refugee children fleeing to the United States.

The Archdiocese of Dubuque's Catholic Charities has developed a plan to assist immigrant children and families and at this weekend's Masses will hold a special collection.

Hope House has scheduled for Monday, Aug. 25, a public event with information on the crisis and that charitable organization's plan to help.

"As a faith-based community, we feel it is our place to help anyone in need," said Tracy Morrison, executive director of Catholic Charities. "Everyone deserves to be cared for with dignity and respect."

From October to July, about 63,000 unaccompanied children were arrested after entering the U.S. illegally, double the number from the same period a year earlier, according to The Associated Press. Another 63,000 families -- mothers or fathers with young children -- were arrested during that period.

"I think it's an issue we need to respond to," said the Rev. Gene Kutsch, who will deliver an address at the event.

The 166 parishes in the Archdiocese of Dubuque will be encouraged to take a special collection at this weekend's Masses. Catholic Charities will distribute the funds to help case-management services at the border, relief services in Central America and response efforts in the diocese.

The archdiocese said it plans to provide outreach and financial assistance to unaccompanied children and agencies hoping to help them, coordinate legal representation to ensure due process for immigrants and facilitate connections to bilingual mental-health services.

"We are concerned that there are young children at our nation's border who are seeking refuge in the United States, and they are without their parents, they are without their families, they are without



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Jessica Pape

caretakers. And our government refuses to respond," Morrison said. "Our church is very much preparing for this disaster. And we do call it a disaster; it's a man-made disaster. We are preparing to help these children and their families whenever they do come to Iowa, if they come to Iowa."

Kutsch said he will discuss what he called myths about the latest immigration issue, which he said underscored the need for comprehensive reform of federal immigration laws.

Meantime, he said the U.S. should be welcoming the immigrant children.

"Crime and violence are so blatant (in some Central American countries) that families see their children very much in danger of seeing violence or death," Kutsch said. "We need to be much more welcoming and compassionate. ... We are better people when we are a diverse people."