



Rally for migrant kids

Religious leaders urge compassion for 'the innocent'

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Nuns, rabbis, Muslim leaders and church officials yesterday urged Long Islanders to embrace the hundreds of unaccompanied minors who have crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally to try to reunite with relatives here.

The combination interfaith prayer service and news conference in Wyandanch was organized partly in response to public outrage over a proposal to temporarily house some of the children at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Commack.

"Today we stand here together, we of different faiths, to say that God places upon us that same responsibility as God had placed upon our ancestors — to care for the strangers and the less fortunate in our midst," Rabbi Steven Moss told the 50 people gathered at Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Catholic Church in Wyandanch.

"One thing that is for sure is the children of our world and our community — the innocent ones, the most vulnerable ones — are the ones who need our compassion, care, support and



Sister Marie Josee of Port Jefferson, center, sings "We Shall Overcome" with other immigrant advocates in Wyandanch yesterday.

protection most of all," said Moss, chairman of the Suffolk County Human Rights Commission.

Habeeb Ahmed, a leader of the Westbury-based Islamic Center of Long Island, said he wondered whether the children would be received differently if they were from Europe rather than Central America. "It is really heartbreaking to see these kids," he said.

A dozen faith leaders spoke at the event, including represen-

tatives of Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock and First Baptist Church of Riverhead, and the Long Island Council of Churches, Jewish Community Relations Council, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island and Lutheran church.

The event was also organized by the pro-immigrant groups Long Island Jobs With Justice and LI WINS.

More than 2,200 boys and girls, ages 17 and younger, were released from federal custody

in the first seven months of 2014 to live with parents, other relatives or sponsors in Nassau and Suffolk counties, according to federal officials. Most are from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala and are said to be fleeing poverty, violence and gangs.

A proposal disclosed in August to temporarily house some of the children in Commack while awaiting deportation hearings spurred protests from residents who feared the move

would increase crime and lower property values. In response, Holy Cross church leaders have shelved the plan.

Some of the children are still being housed by MercyFirst in Syosset on the campus of a Catholic high school.

The Rev. William Brisotti, pastor of Miraculous Medal, said the children have come to America without immigration documents because "there is no legal way for poor people to come. Period."

Daughters of Wisdom Sisters Marie Josee Seide, Marilyn Soeder, Bernadette Sassone, Barbara O'Dea, Irene Arsenault and Maureen Hurley were among other nuns, rabbis, Muslim leaders and church officials urging compassion for the innocent as they gathered in Wyandanch, NY for a news conference and inter-faith prayer on September 20, 2014. The event was called "Welcoming the Stranger" and organized partly in response to the recent public outrage over a proposal to temporarily house immigrant children in a Long Island church.