

## SAINTS ALIVE! NOVEMBER 13: MOTHER FRANCES CABRINI



My father lived in downtown Chicago. A few blocks from his brownstone condominium you had a choice: turn left, walk a half mile and end up at The Second City. Turn right and a mile up the road you arrived at Cabrini Green, notable as the most dangerous public housing project in the country. “Smart white folks” stayed away from Cabrini Green.

Cabrini Green is named after St. Frances Cabrini for her work with Italian immigrants in Chicago. Like the residents of Cabrini Green during the 70's and 80's, the Italian immigrants were the sort of people that citizens avoided.

Mother Frances Cabrini was born in Italy in 1850. Two decades later, at the urging of Pope Leo XIII she came to the United States to help the Italian immigrants – mostly poor – who were overwhelming the major urban areas, including Chicago and New York. People were not initially supportive of her work for immigrants.

Undaunted, she eventually founded schools, hospitals, and orphanages. She became the first American citizen (she was naturalized earlier) to be canonized. St. Frances is the patroness of immigrants.

Today, we still have immigrants in need of support in Artesia, New Mexico, home of the [Artesia Family Detention Center](#). Sitting on the ironically named Hope Highway, these prison-like facilities are used by the U.S. government to detain 600 mothers and children immigrants, women from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, with their children, mostly under age of 14.

Artesia is 3 ½ hours away from any significant town and hundreds of miles away from legal services. Last August, volunteers from [Catholic Charities of Oregon](#) took the better part of a day to get to Artesia. They were there to provide legal services. These volunteers were in Artesia to welcome the stranger and protect the vulnerable, which are foundations of our Catholic faith.

These immigrants have no right to legal representation but it is allowed. Mothers who are fortunate to have legal representation must share their stories of abuse and violence in front of their children and others. Nothing is confidential.

Detainees can plead their case for asylum, again in front of their children, but how effective can that be without legal service or interpreters? Asylum hearings are held in Virginia through video conferencing, which the volunteers described as spotty.

I asked these volunteers how they kept all that they witnessed inside. They said that they waited until returning home before breaking down and crying.

Medical care is minimal. The food is awful. Due process and human rights are routinely violated.

### **Want to help in Artesia? Here's how:**

- Translations from Spanish to English [sarah@corstange.com](mailto:sarah@corstange.com)
- Volunteer interpreters who can speak and interpret Quiche, Mam, Ixil, Achi, and Aketeko to English/Spanish [kcmahon@ilgrp.com](mailto:kcmahon@ilgrp.com)
- Mental health professionals who are licensed in New Mexico [sarista@cliniclegal.org](mailto:sarista@cliniclegal.org)
- Volunteer immigration attorneys who want to go to Artesia [STimmons@aila.org](mailto:STimmons@aila.org)
- Financial Donations in the form of Visa gift cards can be sent to PO BOX 1422, Artesia NM 88211, label them (legal services or post release/hospitality services)

[Learn more](#)

St. Frances Cabrini, protector of all immigrants, pray for us.



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