

Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

Luke 18:15-16

Family is a cornerstone of American values. Across a diversity of traditions, the faith community upholds the intrinsic value of individual human life within the context of family and community. Biblical representations of family show the sacredness of a united family. There are many examples of close relationships between adult children and their parents in the Hebrew Bible and in Christian texts: Abraham and Isaac, Mary and Jesus. Today, family remains the fundamental unit of society through which people are raised and become contributing members of our communities.

Core values

- Families are the basic unit of strong communities
- All families belong together

Families are the basic unit of strong communities. Family members help one another navigate a new culture, pursue job opportunities, start businesses, and contribute economically, socially, and spiritually to society. As faith communities, we believe that every family deserves stability and security, and administrative and congressional action should prioritize family unity. It is essential that our immigration laws value family unity.

Show kindness to parents, to kinsfolk and orphans, and to the needy.

Quran 4:36



The face of immigration

Pastor Max Villatoro was in the U.S. for more than 20 years. He had Temporary Protected Status but fell out of status due to bad legal advice. He subsequently tried for several years to legalize his status. On March 3, 2015, he was apprehended by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. ICE considered Pastor Villatoro a priority for deportation due to two past criminal convictions for DUI and document fraud (the latter related to his immigration status).

Both convictions were more than 15 years in the past and do not represent the man he is now. Not only does Pastor Villatoro eschew alcohol use for himself, he has helped numerous others who struggle with addictions. His

positive impact on the community in Iowa City was illustrated by the tens of thousands who signed petitions trying to stop his deportation. He is clearly not a threat to public safety.

Pastor Villatoro was deported to Honduras on March 20, 2015, leaving behind a wife with DACA status and four U.S. citizen children.

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The love, commitment, and support of family is a great gift that creates purpose for individuals, is central to our faith, and grounds the very structure of our society.

Rev. Dr. Gerald L. Mansholt, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

How do our faith principles inform our policy recommendations?

End family detention and family separation at the border. Migrant children traveling alone from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, and thousands of migrant families with young children have sought refuge and protection in the United States. The U.S. government's response was to introduce massive and inhumane family detention centers for those traveling as family units and negative legislation that would rollback protections for those children traveling alone. In order to preserve family unity, especially for children fleeing violence and trauma alone, we do not support any rollback of protections for unaccompanied children found in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. These protections allow for children to be safely and successfully reunited with family members. We support an end to family detention and an increase of community-based case management for those pursuing asylum.

End unlawful presence bars. Barring family members from being eligible for family-based visas due solely to their undocumented status perpetuates the separation of many mixed-status families. After the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act was signed into law in 1996, some families had to choose between either remaining separated or seeking reunification unlawfully – an immensely painful choice to make. This failed policy did not reduce undocumented immigration; in fact, it increased the number of families choosing to live in the United States without immigration status rather than live apart from family members. We support the congressional repeal of the 3- and 10-year bars for the spouse, child, sibling, or parent of U.S. citizens and for the spouse and child of lawful permanent residents, and an increased use of discretion to address hardships caused by separating family members.

Strengthen family-based immigration. Under current immigration law, U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents are allowed to petition for family members to join them in the United States, but wait times to receive a family visa range from a few months to 23 years. The number of family based visas should better reflect the demand, so that family members are not forced into prolonged separation based on arbitrary and outdated quotas. We support policies that reduce visa application wait times and provide for faster reunification with spouses and minor children.

Remove legal limitations for families. Currently, only the spouse and minor children of U.S. citizens are regarded as "Immediate Relatives," leaving the spouse and minor children of Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) to endure lengthy separation. A spouse is a spouse, and a child is a child, regardless of the U.S. family member's citizenship status. The spouse and minor children of LPRs should be processed as Immediate Relatives, which would drastically reduce their wait times for family reunification. U.S. law should not use citizenship status to separate minor children from their parents or spouses from one another. This reform should ensure that the visas typically allocated to the spouse and minor children of LPRs are reallocated to the other family-based visa categories, which would also help reduce and prevent backlogs in the future.

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4.5 MILLION

Approximate number of U.S. children with at least one undocumented parent

17 CHILDREN PER DAY

On average placed in foster care in 2012 after the detention or deportation of a parent
ICE Fact Sheet, 2012

23 YEARS

The longest family visa wait time for relatives of U.S. citizens