

## Core values

- Families are the basic unit of strong communities
- All families belong together, regardless of immigration status

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.

It is essential that American immigration laws uphold our commitments as a nation

that values family unity and as a nation of immigrants. Unfortunately, thousands of families are separated for years through the red tape, bureaucracy and harsh enforcement tactics of our broken immigration system. Backlogs at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the limited number of visas force many families to choose between being separated for extended periods of time or entering the country unlawfully. Additionally, many families in the United States that have “mixed status” – such as parents who are undocumented who may have U.S. citizen children or an undocumented immigrant who is married to a U.S. citizen or a legal permanent resident – are often separated due to differing immigration statuses when the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conducts immigration enforcement actions. *(continued on next page)*

*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

## The face of immigration

### Leydi

After Leydi’s husband was deported, Leydi and her children spiraled into homelessness before finding a roommate and apartment. In order to turn on the utilities, however, the local utility company required a social security number. Leydi was arrested for identity fraud and subsequently sentenced to three years in prison.

Her children, between the ages of 4 and 10, were then placed into three different foster homes. A non-profit ministry and friends stepped in and now the children, all U.S. citizens, live with a family whose own husband is in deportation proceedings and who struggle financially to care for them.

Due to the Secure Communities program, Leydi’s arrest triggered an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainer and so, once she completes her sentence, she may find herself further detained by ICE as she seeks relief from deportation. Many obstacles remain but, with the help of friends and advocates, Leydi will hopefully be reunited with her children, even if it means a de-facto deportation of her U.S. citizen children as well.

Thousands of other families are not so lucky. Over 5,000 U.S.-citizen children of deported immigrants have been placed into foster care in the U.S. Because their parents are usually unable to attend child custody hearings, most of these families will never be reunited ([arc.org/shatteredfamilies](http://arc.org/shatteredfamilies)).

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A fair immigration system must improve and strengthen the family immigration process by:

- **Recapturing visas** lost to bureaucratic delay to reduce the current backlog;
- **Reclassifying spouses and minor children** of lawful permanent residents as immediate relatives;
- **Raising the per country visa limits** from seven to ten percent of total admissions to reduce long wait times for certain nationalities;
- **Eliminating unlawful presence bars** for the spouse, child, or parent of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents;
- **Admitting surviving members** of deceased family petitioners;
- **Eliminating the cap on the total number of family-based visas** available; and
- **Increasing the use of discretion** to address hardships caused by removing the parent, spouse, son or daughter of a U.S. citizen or green card holder.

*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?

**Immigration Accountability Executive Actions:** On November 20, 2014, President Obama announced a plan that expanded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, created the Deferred Action for Parents of Americas and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), and established new enforcement priorities for deportation. These programs will offer deportation relief to millions of members of our families, communities, and congregations. While we await a comprehensive immigration reform package, we support these actions as they uphold the value of family unity by allowing families to live without fear of forced separation due to one or more family member's lack of valid immigration status.

**Central American Migration:** In 2014, 68,000 migrant children traveling alone from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, and tens of thousands more migrant families with young children arrived at the US Southwest border, many seeking refuge and protection in the United States. The United States government's response to these children and families seeking asylum 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. Both of these responses threaten family unity as they prevent family reunification once a child or family arrives in the United States.

In order to preserve family unity, especially for the children fleeing violence and trauma alone, we do not support any rollbacks to the protections for these children found in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. These protections allow for children to be safely and successfully reunited with family members.

**Family-Based Visa System:** Under the current immigration system, U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents are allowed to petition for family members to join them in the United States. Wait times to receive a family visa range from a few months to 23 years. Due to the immense backlogs of visa applications for family members, we support legislation and policies that reduce the time some family members must wait before being able to reunite with their loved ones through the visa application process and provide for faster reunification for spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents.



**4.5 million**

Approximate number of U.S. citizen children who have at least one undocumented parent

**46,686**

The number of parents of U.S. citizen children who were deported in the first 6 months of fiscal year 2011

**17**

The estimated number of children placed under state care each day as a result of the detention or deportation of their parents

**23 years**

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

**19 years**

The longest family visa wait time for relatives of legal permanent residents



**Interfaith Immigration Coalition | [interfaithimmigration.org](http://interfaithimmigration.org) | March 2015 |** African American Ministers in Action • American Baptist Home Mission Societies of the American Baptist Churches, USA • American Friends Service Committee • American Jewish Committee • Bread for the World • Christian Reformed Church • Church of the Brethren • Church World Service • Columban Center for Advocacy & Outreach • Conference of Major Superiors of Men • Daughters of Charity • Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ) • The Episcopal Church • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) • Franciscan Action Network • Friends Committee on National Legislation • Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society • Interfaith Worker Justice • Irish Apostolate USA • Islamic Information Center • Jesuit Refugee Service • Jewish Council for Public Affairs • Leadership Conference of Women Religious • Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service • Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns • Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office • Muslim Public Affairs Council • National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd • National Council of Churches • National Council of Jewish Women • NETWORK, A Catholic Social Justice Lobby • Pax Christi USA • PICO National Network • Presbyterian Church USA, Immigration Issues Offices • Sisters of Mercy of the Americas • Sojourners • 3P Human Security • T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights • Union for Reform Judaism • Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations • United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries • United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society • UNITED SIKHS • U.S. Jesuit Conference • World Relief