Current enforcement policies have torn families and communities apart, devastated our congregations and violated the rights of U.S. citizens and immigrants alike. Each day in our congregations, direct service programs, health care facilities, and schools, we witness the human consequences of a broken, overly punitive, and outdated immigration system. We see the exploitation of undocumented workers and the plight of separated families, as well as the fear in communities where immigrants, and those perceived to be immigrants, are targets of injustice. People of faith who visit, accompany, or represent immigrants in detention facilities witness firsthand the toll incarceration takes on those detained, their families, and our communities. The exponential growth of the immigration detention industry has reached an all-time high, forged on an unhealthy alliance with for-profit prison companies.

This perpetuation of suffering offends the dignity of all human beings. Compassionate immigration reforms would help heal our communities and our nation. Regardless, immigration enforcement policies must treat all individuals with respect and dignity.

The face of immigration

Jose Juan Federico Moreno, is a father of five from Illinois. Jose Juan has called Illinois home for almost half his life and his children - all U.S. citizens under the age of 15 - have never known any other home. Jose Juan got charged with a DUI in 2009 and because Illinois did not allow undocumented immigrants to obtain drivers licenses at the time, the charge was bumped up to an “aggravated” felony. Even though he paid the required fees, went to classes, and never drove under the influence again, ICE still ordered him to be deported.

After seven years of fighting his deportation, Chicago ICE denied his request to postpone the separation from his family, leaving him no option but to take sanctuary in a south side church in 2016. “Abandoning my children is not a choice I can make. I live for them, and I will fight to stay with them,” says Jose Juan.

“As people of faith, we believe that we are always more than our mistakes and that all God’s children deserve second chances. Faith compels us to respond to injustice, to welcome the stranger, and to promote families staying together,” wrote the church still hosting Jose Juan in sanctuary as of May 2017.

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How do our faith principles inform our policy recommendations?

Separate federal immigration enforcement and local community-driven policing. Policies that strengthen relationships between local law enforcement and the community are essential for public safety. Immigrants, family members of immigrants, and individuals perceived to be immigrants should neither feel vulnerable, nor fear retribution or deportation if they report being victim or witness to a crime. We oppose laws and policies that infringe on the rights of states, cities, localities, and police departments to limit interaction with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). We oppose policies that erode trust between local law enforcement and immigrant communities by mandating or incentivizing collaboration with federal immigration authorities through the 287(g) program, Secure Communities, or other avenues.

Uphold the sanctity of sensitive locations. Immigration enforcement actions should never happen at “sensitive locations,” such as schools, courthouses, places of worship, and healthcare facilities, where community members should feel safe and not in fear of deportation.

Utilize and affirm prosecutorial and judicial discretion. Maintaining judicial and prosecutorial discretion is a core component of a fair justice system. A one-size-fits-all approach to punishment does not serve our communities and undermines the integrity of our justice system. In numerous cases, ICE has not properly applied prosecutorial discretion, particularly for persons with past criminal convictions. Often times, such convictions have occurred several years or even decades ago, and still a person is put into deportation proceedings. This has resulted in the deportation of individuals who clearly pose no threat to public safety. This is a fundamental injustice that must be corrected. We support prosecutorial discretion guidelines in line with principles of fairness and public safety.

Reduce the use of detention for immigration enforcement and improve existing oversight and quality of detention conditions. For as long as immigrants and other individuals are detained, existing detention facilities’ conditions must be improved. We support increasing access to legal counsel, pro bono legal services, and legal orientation programs for immigrant detainees. Congress must establish oversight for all facilities and ensure rigorous medical treatment standards and access to visitation and pastoral care. We oppose mandatory detention and support removing the profit-motive from detention. Meaningful detention reform requires the wholesale expansion of community-based, not for-profit, alternatives to detention (ATD) programs.

$19 BILLION
Immigration enforcement spending annually

34,000+ IMMIGRANTS
In detention on a daily basis

600+ DAYS
The average wait time for case adjudication due to the immigration court backlog

800+ SANCTUARY HOUSES OF WORSHIP
Committed to ensuring that immigrant community members are protected from unjust deportation

INTERFAITH IMMIGRATION COALITION