

Encountering IMMIGRATION ISSUES through devotions: Living as Spirit Blessed Communities

INTERFAITH
IMMIGRATION
COALITION

John 20:19-22

DAY 1—vs. 19

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

In seven sessions, you are invited to read the scripture passage at left, and then to read a short devotional thought below. Each corresponds with a theme in the scripture passage and with a key immigration issue. With the devotion, you are also invited to study an accompanying issue brief. Each brief provides opportunities to encounter further background information, statistics, and especially human faces impacted by immigration challenges. All issue briefs have been developed by partner members of the Interfaith Immigration Coalition. A short prayer is likewise provided with each devotion. May these reflections guide your ongoing prayers and strengthen your actions on behalf of the millions of migrants who face daily concerns in our communities.



DAY 1: Vulnerable Populations

¹⁹ Our passage tells us that “...it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear...” On the night of Jesus’ resurrection, fear kept those who loved and had followed Jesus huddled and hidden. It was still only hours since Mary Magdalene’s discovery of Jesus’ missing body and later encounter with her Teacher, and confusion and chaos swirled together with the hope that came from the new reality of the resurrection. What punishment or consequences might come upon Jesus’ followers by those who had crucified him just days before? Would they be blamed for Christ’s disappearance from the tomb? Who—even among Jesus’ closest disciples—fully yet believed the story that Mary had run back from the tomb to tell?

The pedestal of the Statue of Liberty proclaims, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” For well over a century, these words from poet Emma Lazarus have called out a welcome to the generations of immigrants that have shared our shores and shaped our heritage. They proclaim the intention, and offer the presumption, that those who have been huddling would find in the United States an opportunity to stop shaking, to build stability, to find both political security and stable relationships. They are words that understand well the trauma and fear that dominate the days of immigrants throughout their journeys to escape dangers, adjust to new realities, and re-define their communities in a new time and place.

What kinds of companionship might newcomers facing adjustment and anxieties find in knowing the disciples also faced fears amid their new reality after the resurrection?

Read the “**Vulnerable Populations**” issue brief and consider the challenges that Norah and millions like her face when coming to and living in this country. How can your faith lead you to establish personal relationships with, and fight for just policies for, refugees, asylees, and survivors of domestic violence?

Prayer: God who has guided your peoples through anxiety in all times, strengthen our ability to welcome those arriving at our shores. Increase our hospitality for the suffering, and make us sensitive to offer relationships that reduce the fears of those who endure daily transitions and uncertainties in their new lives as neighbors among us. Amen.

--Devotion offered by: Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Director of Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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John 20:19-22

DAY 2—vs. 19b

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”
²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”
²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

DAY 2: Workers’ Rights

Although the disciples were hiding behind doors barred shut for fear of retaliation by those in political power, verse 19 tells us next that “Jesus came and stood among them.”



Photo: Sean Havey/KOJD. Farmworkers near Bakersfield, CA.

In the days before his death, Jesus had promised his anxious followers: “I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you” (John 14:18.) Already that resurrection morning, Jesus had demonstrated a rock tomb could not contain him from living again near his followers. Now a door which the gospel writer seems intent to describe as “locked” lay between Jesus and the disciples he loved. Yet miraculously, Jesus nonetheless broke beyond the barrier to find them, despite their hiding—and intentionally came to be among them. Eight days later, he would again find his way in through locked doors to be with them in their fears. By doing so, Jesus demonstrated he was unafraid to be near and with them in their fear. He came into their shadowed existence to again be a part of their community. Yet, perhaps because he so understood their fears, he did not push them initially to take risks to show themselves to others beyond their level of comfort. Rather, his was a posture of comforting presence and accompaniment.

Daily, over 11 million immigrants in the U.S. live an existence shadowed in fears. “I am afraid for my mother to drive the car even to get groceries on the way home” said one recent 7 year old girl; fearful that her as yet undocumented mother might be detained or deported as she returns from work helping produce food, and then seeks to buy food for her own citizen children. Far too often, those who harvest the crops on our tables, or serve us in hotels, are held “locked in” their fears due to unjust work conditions and trafficking.

Can you think of ways Christ’s presence—through communities of faith—can, or has, intentionally sought to be present in comfort and intentional accompaniment with immigrant communities?

Read the “**Workers’ rights**” issue brief to learn more about how work practices too often keep immigrant families locked into poverty and fear. How might persons of faith act to be “barrier breakers” to open opportunities for immigrant families to overcome oppressive work conditions and build more just worker conditions and wages?

Prayer: God who called us to treat new residents among us as citizens, help us remember the lives of persons like Antonio and Teresa who help meet the needs and contribute to the economy of our nation. At every meal we eat, may we remember the ones who have helped to grow and harvest our food. May our awareness be turned to actions for worker justice. Amen.

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John 20:19-22

DAY 3—vs. 19end-20

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

DAY 3: Root Causes of Migration

Was presence and accompaniment all that Christ offered his followers? After entering through the keyhole and into the place where the disciples had gathered in shivering and hiding to find security, Christ very quickly offered them a gift even beyond his presence. He stood among them with a particular message: “Peace be with you.”



Jesus’ committed and barrier breaking presence despite a locked door, his accompaniment, and the gift of peace are all offered within a single sentence! In both verse 19 and in verse 21 of our passage, Jesus reiterates his intention to not only *be* present, but also to *define* what his presence means and can bring to the disciples’ community. In chapter 14:27 of John’s gospel, Jesus had first offered peace as a “parting gift” before his death—saying “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give it to you.” Rather, Jesus’ peace offered a way to “let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (again, 14:27) in the midst of any earthly challenge.

Now after his resurrection, Jesus’ new presence has come to offer an even deeper fulfillment of the earthly peace previously granted. Jesus’ peace is not any superficial calm that consists of a mere absence of fighting or the repression or denial of conflict. It was a peace defined incarnationally; as Jesus turned to his body immediately after his offering of peace to show them his hands and his side. By so doing, he demonstrated peace as that which conquered his own pain and suffering. His living again among them showed—very concretely—his victory over the injustices faced in his own life. And so, the peace Christ offered contains the challenge to allow his peace to continue to give courage that dissipates fear of the world’s ongoing persecution and builds trust in God’s ongoing victory over injustice.

Those who begin a journey of migration and ultimately enter the U.S. do so most often because of root causes that underlie their need to leave their homes of origin. These root causes especially include realities of extreme poverty, political instability and violence, and other physical and environmental threats. Theirs are

home environments where peace can be difficult to find, and complex international trade policies—often from the U.S. side—further exacerbate the injustices experienced in their homelands.

What might Christ’s offer of peace, incarnated in his life and made victorious through his resurrection, offer to individuals and families of immigrants facing the constant pushes of root causes that lead to their migration?

Read more about what causes immigrants to come to the U.S. in the issue brief “**Root Causes of Migration.**” What have you learned about how our own government’s policies intersect with the “push factors to move” that affect migration patterns and numbers? What roles do you hope your faith community might play in strengthening just trade policies and offering real peace for the lives of our global neighbors?

Prayer: Creator of the whole world and its peoples, we thank you, God, for the uniquenesses of each country and populations. Make us faithful stewards of our resources, generous sharers of our resources, and good neighbors to those nations which surround us near and far. Grow within us a deeper understanding of our connectedness and our potential to help your peace influence those factors which cause families to make painful choices to move from their homelands. Amen.

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John 20:19-22

DAY 4—vs. 20b

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”



DAY 4: Citizenship & Integration

Although no “media moguls” were in the room to Tweet or Facebook the reactions of the disciples, Christ’s physical

documentation of his survival of suffering by showing his hands and his side produced a clear and seemingly immediate response. At the close of verse 20, we are told, “Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” It was an age long before “social media.” Yet, brand new feelings began instantly to “trend” within their society as the evidence of Christ’s overcoming of pain and death led to celebrations that dominated even the fears that had held them behind the locked door! Their fear of consequences upon their faith community finally began to relax, and instead their hearts began to feel joy and—finally—freedom!

The kind of documentation being asked for from entering immigrants today is much more than the requirements made upon many of our own ancestors. All immigrants struggled for acceptance, but yet papers weren’t asked to be presented. Our nation’s immigration laws have become increasingly complex; leading today to the separation between those termed to be “documented” versus “undocumented.” Jesus in verse 20 discloses a new form of “documentation” based upon his own suffering. By showing his hands and side, he “documents” God’s intention to bring the hope of freedom from persecution to the world.

How does a lack of citizenship opportunities continue to hold immigrants locked in fear and often ethnic persecution? How might we represent Christ’s hope for freedom beyond suffering by supporting our immigrant

neighbors in their quest for citizenship status?

Read the issue brief “**Citizenship & Integration**” to learn more about the importance of citizenship status. What types of challenges and roadblocks are often encountered by immigrants to work, learn, and contribute to society throughout the long years of their journeys toward citizenship? What might be one or more specific actions you or your faith community can take to cultivate hospitality that communicates the freedom of Christ by supporting DREAMers and others seeking citizenship status in your community?

Prayer: God, help us live as Christ lived to reduce the suffering of those in our communities who have felt bound and afraid. Give us courage to offer the freedom we feel through you by offering those who have come to reside among us. And keep us open to the reality that, as we offer hospitality, we may be influenced beyond our imagining by the strength and courage of our immigrant neighbors. Amen.

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John 20:19-22

DAY 5—vs. 21

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."
20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

DAY 5: Border Policies

In verse 21, Jesus encourages his followers again by reminding them of the peace his life and overcoming of death offers to them. But in the passage, it becomes now—and *only* now—that Jesus asks his followers to dare to put their fears into "lock down mode" instead of them staying locked in behind a closed door! Jesus seems to be very sensitive to how hard it must be for them to think about claiming the courage and freedom he has offered in a way that changes their behavior. And so, Jesus continues his teaching after he reiterates his offering of peace by saying in verse 21, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."



The same Jesus who *came to* them out of the grave and through a locked door is also one who desires to *send them* away from their fears which threaten to entomb and stifle their freedom. Jesus encourages them to leave their place and behavior of hiding, to move beyond themselves, and to step forward as ones intended to convey the peace they have been granted to others outside the locked door. In this way, Jesus asks his followers to live in the pattern of his own life; Jesus was sent by God to them, and we are sent out by Jesus. The gift of peace (offered twice within just three verses!) is the first gift offered to give us the courage to go forward. Jesus is one who, in both coming to us (through a locked door) and in sending us out, breaks boundaries and moves beyond borders!

Mexico is our nearest neighbor in the U.S., with a long previous history of porous and productive relationships across the borders. "We used to cross the border all the time in earlier years to shop, visit, and get medical care" stated one Hispanic pastor's wife in Texas, who lives just above Matamoros, Mexico. "But in recent years, the crossing is so much more dangerous, and more expensive due to violence and economics in Mexico." With a nearly 2,000 mile border that spans six Mexican states and four U.S. states, it encompasses major urban areas and vast and inhospitable desert lands. Desert, financial, and safety challenges have resulted in over 4,000 persons dying while attempting to cross the border since 1998.

Are there any messages about borders and boundaries you hear communicated through passages like verse 21 above? How does your faith inform your preferences about U.S.-Mexico border policies and treatment of those detained during or after crossing?

Read the "**Border Policies**" issue brief to encounter the human challenges, and see the human faces, that are affected by U.S. border policies with our neighbor Mexico. Consider the story of Ignacia, who struggled during her pregnancy to enter the U.S., and share other stories of families you may know who have been affected by our country's border policies. How much do you think our nation should spend on enforcement? How might you or your faith group consider voicing your desire for what you believe are the most humane deportation practices?

Prayer: God who calls us to "love our neighbor as ourselves," keep us praying often for our near neighbors in Mexico, and for those whose families are separated on both sides of the border. For those who may be crossing that border today, we pray for safety. Be ever near to them and to us, dear God, that we may hear your voice speaking to us with compassion and vision as we engage in efforts to be faithful followers of you, and welcoming friends among our neighbors. Amen.

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John 20:19-22

DAY 6—vs. 22

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”



DAY 6: Interior Enforcement

The morning of the day that precedes this passage had started with an experience that left Mary breathless. As she'd gone to the tomb where Jesus had been lain (John 20:1), it was empty! Running

to tell the others, her physical breathlessness became matched by a her soul's breathlessness from anxiety. Struggling to regain air to tell her remarkable story to others, Peter and the other disciple responded to her story not with words, but like relay racers—as they ran again back to the tomb to confirm the news.

As the day wore on, fear continued to take away more of the disciples' breath. Then at nightfall, they were again made breathless by the shock that Christ's miraculous entry through their locked door must have caused! With all the breathlessness of the day, how comforting it must have been to experience what Jesus did next! As a follow up on his sending of them in verse 21, he offered a simple but powerful gesture as he gospel says he “breathed on them” (verse 22.) Before they took any step, Jesus gave them “out the door breath.” It was a gift better than a warm coat, more protective than an umbrella, more comforting than the best GPS. Jesus' breath offered them *life* for their journey.

So many of our policy discussions, and our national resources, are invested in strengthening our borders...making sure walls that divide us become deeper,

longer, more fortified. Indeed, U.S. taxpayers spent over \$18 billion on immigration enforcement in 2012 alone. This amount was more than was spent on all other federal law enforcement agencies combined.

Read the “**Interior Enforcement**” issue brief. Review the statistics of resources invested and families impacted by border practices, and discuss the following: What kinds of border security best help communicate your core faith values? How do you hope that enforcement practices treat individuals like those in Jose Juan Moreno's family? Have you heard other stories in your community of persons detained, and what treatment do you hope they would experience as our country struggles to reform our policies?

Prayer: Boundary breaking God, make us forever grateful for the security we find in you. Guide us to build our knowledge of our nation's actions at our borders. Move through our hearts with your wisdom to send us forward with messages to speak with our legislators to communicate our visions of humane enforcement. And empower our actions to build relationships with our immigrant neighbors that help them move beyond fear and find full freedom of opportunities for a better life as your children. Amen.

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John 20:19-22

DAY 7—vs. 22b

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

DAY 7: Family Unity

After giving the gift of peace (and reminding them of it a second time!), after calling them to following his pattern of being sent, and after boosting their readiness by sharing life through his breath, Jesus finished his gift giving by clarifying the source of the life and hope he offered them. “Receive the Holy Spirit” said Jesus after he breathed on them. And so, by blowing in the breath of the Holy Spirit, Jesus “commissioned them.”



Jesus offered a final preparation for their sending in a way that evoked how Yahweh had “breathed into the nostrils the breath of life” in Genesis 2:7 to form the first human being during creation. Jesus, who in John 19:30 had “given up his spirit” on the cross now passed the Spirit forward to his disciples. By doing so, he gave his community the fullness of what he’d promised at the Last Supper to give to them in order that they might carry out their sacred mission to “wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14) and “love one another; even as I have loved you” (13:34.) In a breath that blew like the wind, Jesus blew into their lives a share of his own relationship with God. It was to be a wind they experienced again in the rush of the Holy Spirit that was to come soon to give witness among all languages on the day of Pentecost.

Immigrant families understand quite well the need to be sent. Despite love of their own homelands, families are often pushed by the violence and economic poverty of their homes to take great risks for a better and safer life. Some family members are often sent to benefit the others who remain; sending a high percentage of limited wages through farm or other work back to their families. But far too often, families sent to the US are separated either in route or through detention and deportation after arrival. The verses of the passage we have studied all seem oriented to build unity and courage of Jesus’ community, that they may offer hope

and life to others beyond fears.

How do we believe the breath of the Holy Spirit might lead us to work for the safety and unity of families separated by perilous journeys and unjust deportation practices?

God grows and blesses followers through descendants and over generations in both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian texts. Read the **“Family Unity”** issue brief to hear the story of Pastor Max’s family and to understand more about the intersection between family struggles and U.S. immigration processes. How do you think the emphasis of family relationships in scriptures leads you as a person of faith to support the unity of immigrant families? How might your faith lead you to be involved in helping to stop the trafficking of especially mothers and children who are immigrants? What other stories have you heard in your church, or in the news, of children, parents, and spouses separated from one another due to current deportation practices, and in what ways do you feel ready to act to breathe hope into immigrants’ lives and new life into our nation’s immigration policies?

Prayer: God who so valued us as individuals that you stamped us with Your image, we give you thanks for your creative touch. We praise you, too, for then placing each of us within families—of our birth, and chosen communities—which continue to nurture and guide us. For every family member pulled apart through migration from those they love, we pray Your presence may be near them. Offer healing for children who miss their parents and courage for parents making unbelievable sacrifices to support their families. And remind us, God, of how you call us to be unified as One, in a family of faith, bound together by your Pentecost Spirit, to follow you and to share your breath of life with our hurting and fragmented world. Amen.

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The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:34

Millions of refugees around the world are forced to flee their homes due to violence and persecution, and today we are facing the worst displacement crisis in global history with more than 65 million displaced persons worldwide including over 21 million refugees. Following World War II, the U.S. became the world leader in welcoming refugees who seek safety from persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Over time, the system has evolved to have a strong infrastructure grounded in public-private partnerships, where communities across the United States have recognized the important economic and social benefits of resettling refugees, and are active in helping them integrate and thrive in their new homes.

Core values

- Champion our asylum system so that children, women, and men have access to the protection they need and are not forced to return to deadly or dangerous conditions.
- Build inclusive communities that strengthen our capacity to welcome refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied children.
- Invest in expanding protections for refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied children in the United States and abroad, and while addressing root causes of their displacement.
- Demonstrate leadership to improve the collective U.S. and international response to the largest displacement crisis in global history.

Less than one percent of refugees are ever resettled to a third country. When provided the resources and support they need to rebuild their lives, refugees have opened businesses, revitalized towns, and contribute economically, socially, and spiritually to our communities. Many refugees become U.S. citizens and see their children graduate from U.S. schools. Among communities of faith across traditions, our shared call to “welcome the stranger” has brought us together in support of this life-saving program and the protection of those who seek peace and safety within our borders.



The face of refugee resettlement

Norah Bagirinka became a refugee after surviving the Rwandan Genocide. After she survived, she realized that God had given her another chance to live. To give back, she devoted her life to advocating for women and children and worked at several international organizations including directing a sexual and gender-based violence program with International Rescue Committee. In 2007, Norah’s asylum case was approved and she moved to Columbus, Ohio, where she founded Refugee Women in Action, a nonprofit organization where she guides, supports, and provides life skills to refugee families.

Norah graduated from Ohio Christian University with a B.A. in health care management and currently works as a community outreach specialist for the Health Services Advisory Group. Norah was recently appointed to serve as the Delegate for the state of Ohio with the Refugee Congress where she seeks to champion domestic and international refugee issues. Norah has raised two of her children through college. One is currently a business owner and the other will be graduating with a nursing degree in December 2017. She became a naturalized U.S. citizen in March of 2017 and a proud home owner a few months later. She feels she has achieved her American dream.

And what ails you that you fight not in the way of God, and for the weak and oppressed--men, women, and children--who cry out: "Our Lord! Bring us forth from this town, whose people are oppressors, and appoint for us from Thee a protector, and appoint for us from Thee a helper." Quran 4:75

How do our faith principles inform our policy recommendations?

Our diverse faith traditions compel us to welcome one another with love and compassion, regardless of place of birth, religion, or ethnicity. All of us are called to love our neighbor – all of our neighbors. Generations of immigrants and refugees have made this country stronger through their ideas, hard work, resilience, and traditions. All communities fleeing to safety – whether they are Syrian, Honduran, Congolese, or anyone else forced to leave because of who they are or what they believe – deserve to be treated with dignity. We recommend the following proposals that provide opportunities for refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied children to thrive and that ensure justice and protection for all.

Invest in the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program to protect more refugees each year and support refugee protection overseas. We are facing the worst displacement crisis in recorded history, and resettlement in the United States is one of the key ways that the U.S. can lead by example and encourage other countries to help refugees. Many of the countries temporarily hosting refugees are overwhelmed by the numbers of displaced individuals in need of protection and have closed their borders and implemented policies against those seeking asylum. U.S. leadership is critical to ensure a response by the United States and international community is commensurate with today's global refugee crisis, as well as to support stability and security in countries and regions faced with large-scale forced displacement.

Improve access to protection for all vulnerable populations. The United States has moral and legal obligations under international and U.S. law to ensure that individuals seeking protection are not returned to their traffickers and others who seek to exploit them. Asylum-seekers, unaccompanied children, and immigrants, including those paroled into the United States, deserve the opportunity to seek safety and rebuild their lives. It is imperative that we keep intact the existing protections for unaccompanied children, as weakening protections undermine our moral authority and increase vulnerabilities to exploitation. Adequate resources are also needed to ensure our communities are in the best position to help them integrate and succeed.

Expand public-private partnerships at the local, state, and federal levels to mobilize continued community-driven support for refugee resettlement. Communities of faith stand ready to welcome more refugees, asylum seekers, and unaccompanied children into their hearts and their congregations. We urge our elected leaders to reflect the best of our nation and live out our American values of compassion, hospitality, and welcome.

In opening our communities to refugees from persecution in other lands, our nation shows forth our core values of respecting human rights and dignity. As bishop of a community who has welcomed as friend and neighbor refugees from places as diverse as Sudan, Iraq, and Myanmar, I know first-hand the gift of life that we provide as well as the great gift we receive from those who come to live among us.

Bishop James Mathes, The Episcopal Diocese of San Diego

21 MILLION REFUGEES

Worldwide and growing according to UNHCR estimates

1% OF REFUGEES

Will be permanently resettled

60 MILLION PEOPLE

Forcibly displaced worldwide

INTERFAITH IMMIGRATION COALITION

African American Ministers in Action • American Baptist Home Mission Societies of the American Baptist Churches, USA • American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) • American Jewish Committee (AJC) • Bread for the World • Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee and Immigration Ministries • Christian Community Development Association • Christian Reformed Church • Church of the Brethren • Church World Service (CWS) • CLINIC | Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. • Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach • Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) • Daughters of Charity • The Episcopal Church • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) • Franciscan Action Network • Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) • HIAS • Ignatian Solidarity Network (ISN) • Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) • Irish Apostolate USA • Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States • Jesuit Refugee Service • Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) • Leadership Conference of Women Religious • Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) • Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns • Mennonite Central Committee U.S. • Muslim Public Affairs Council • National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd • National Council of Churches • National Council of Jewish Women • National Justice for Our Neighbors • NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice • Pax Christi USA • PICO National Network • Presbyterian Church USA, Immigration Issues Offices • Scalabrini International Migration Network (SIMN)/Center for Migration Studies (CMS) • Sisters of Mercy of the Americas • Sojourners • T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights • Union for Reform Judaism • Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) • Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) • United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries • United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society • UNITED SIKHS • World Relief • interfaithimmigration.org 2017

The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your field are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

James 5:41

Our country has long benefitted from immigrant workers who contribute necessary skills and labor for our communities and economy. All workers benefit from the enforcement of health, safety, and wage-and-hour laws, as well as the right to peacefully organize. Employers should be held accountable to abide by labor protections and standards for all workers, regardless of immigration status. As people of faith, we seek policies that decrease immigrants' vulnerabilities to exploitation and reduce unfair and discriminatory hiring and firing practices.

Since the 1940s, two guest worker programs have brought low-wage immigrants to the United States for temporary agricultural and non-agricultural work. Unfortunately, these programs give guest workers a very restrictive immigration status and have inadequate workplace protections.

Recognizing that many guest workers have experienced extreme exploitation and abuse, sometimes akin to human trafficking, we call for faithful and robust enforcement of workplace protections regardless of immigrant status. It is immoral for our nation to benefit from the labor of individuals who contribute to our economy while preventing them from being fully part of our society.

Core values

- Equal rights and equal treatment of all workers
- Employers should not be able to threaten workers with deportation
- Workplace enforcement that eliminates exploitation of workers
- Workers should be allowed to organize

The faces of immigration



Antonio came to the U.S. from Guatemala to earn money to support his family back home. He worked for 3 years in the food court of a federal building in Washington, D.C., where he cooked, cleaned, and cashiered. The minimum wage in Washington was \$8.25/hour. However, he was paid \$6.50/hour for the first year, and \$7/hour for the second year. Antonio recalls, "I worked 59 hours per week, but was never paid for the hours I worked overtime. When I asked for a raise, my boss said that making \$6.50/hour was good enough for a Latino like me. My immigration status had never been an issue before I spoke up and participated in a strike. I then was detained by immigration officials." From Good Jobs Nation, goodjobsnation.org.

Teresa is a farm worker who left Oaxaca when she was four and began working in the fields when she was eight. Now at 32, she is totally disabled by arthritis as a result of the work. Teresa recalls, "I had to work out of necessity. I started working in the United States at 14 in California and in Washington state....Sometimes the foremen would...tell us to work faster or we would be fired....Another experience I had is that owners would pay us with a check that doesn't have funds....That happened three times. After [doing this work] for five years...everything changed. I kept working, but then I was diagnosed with arthritis when I was just 22 years old." Teresa has since used money she earned working in the fields for medical care, yet her health has not improved. From Stories from the Field, a collaboration between Farmworker Justice and photojournalist David Bacon. See more stories at: www.farmworkerjustice.org. Copyright 2013 Farmworker Justice.



How do our faith principles inform our policy recommendations?

Ensure robust implementation of existing U.S. labor and employment laws, including the *Fair Labor Standards Act*, the *National Labor Relations Act*, and their state equivalents. Conduct better work site monitoring, create more robust enforcement mechanisms, and increase awareness about U- and T-visas. Provide sufficient resources to Department of Labor to identify and provide redress for exploitation, and to hold employers accountable.

Untie workers from particular employers to reduce vulnerability to exploitation and ensure freedom of association for all workers, including guest workers. To ensure workers – including farm and other guest workers – fully realize their rights and can access meaningful justice, it is essential to remove employers' ability to threaten workers with deportation by ensuring job portability. Workers should also be able to effectively exercise their labor rights, form unions, and bargain collectively without fear of intimidation, retaliation, or retribution from employers.

Afford all workers access to permanent lawful status, meaningful opportunities to apply for citizenship, and the ability to live lawfully with their families in the United States. Without this ability, migrant farm workers and other guest workers will be a permanent underclass in our society, a social group that creates and prepares the food we eat but can never sit at the table. Undocumented farm workers should have a chance to earn lawful status by meeting certain work requirements, and the H-2A agricultural program should be revised to help employers fill critical shortages in agricultural positions.

Reform the electronic employment verification (E-Verify) system. The E-Verify program has proven detrimental to migrants, employers, and U.S.-citizen employees alike. It has led to increased discrimination and unfair hiring and firing practices. E-Verify reform should include privacy protections, allow workers to contest and have remedies for erroneous non-confirmations, and shift the burden to the U.S. government to prove that an individual is ineligible to work, rather than requiring an individual to disprove non-confirmation. Mandatory expansion of the current E-Verify program would lead to more problems, particularly in the absence of increased rights and protections for immigrant workers.

And O my people! Give just measure and weight, and do not withhold from the people the things that are their due.

Quran 11:85

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NEARLY 17% OF THE
WORKFORCE

Are foreign-born workers

85% OF FRUITS AND
VEGETABLES

Produced in the U.S. are
hand-picked by farmworkers

\$2 TRILLION

The approximate total
immigrants added to the U.S.
GDP in 2016

2:1 RATIO

Immigrants start businesses
at twice the rate of native-
born citizens

May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people.

Psalm 72:2-4a

Addressing forced displacement effectively and responsibly means providing protection for those who flee violence while focusing on the conditions forcing people to flee. As children of God, all people deserve safety, a unified family, and food on our tables no matter our geographical location. We know that migration is a symptom of deeper social and economic issues, including violence, insecurity, and unequal social and economic conditions. Because of this, no immigration strategy is truly comprehensive and long-term if it does not address the economic, social, and political factors which compel migration.

U.S. policies and practices play a critical role around the world either contributing to or helping address the root causes of those conditions. For Central America and Mexico, U.S. trade policies in tandem with the promotion of large-scale infrastructure projects and extractive industries have exacerbated forced migration and violence. The U.S. must radically reshape our policies and priorities to best protect and promote safety for all people.

Core values

- Reduce the need for people to leave their homes
- Robustly fund programs that help address the root causes of migration
- Invest in community-based, sustainable development to address economic factors leading to migration
- Support human rights and protection mechanisms in the Northern Triangle
- Reshape U.S. trade and foreign policies
- Reshape international financial institutions' policies and practices

The face of immigration



Antonio Garcia, 25, returned to Chihuahua, Mexico, after working at a Texas construction site for only four months. Garcia had the foresight to know he wanted to work in the United States temporarily, save money, and return to Mexico to invest in a small business. "I never wanted to work for someone else," Garcia said.

After returning to Chihuahua, Garcia invested his savings in the machinery for a concrete block factory. A local farmers' cooperative helped him acquire tools for the business. "I bought the machinery and, little by little, it started growing," Garcia said. His success has enabled him to hire three laborers to staff his growing business. With a solid source of long-term income, Garcia is an example of a

rural Mexican youth who has no need to re-migrate to the United States. "If everything goes well, I don't plan on returning," Garcia says. "Maybe only as a tourist."

With the support of local and international stakeholders, the Mexican countryside has the potential to be provide safe, sufficient and sustainable livelihoods rather than being a source for emigration.

And He found thee in need, and made thee independent.

Quran 93:8

How do our faith principles inform our policy recommendations?

Support sustainable community development and assistance. Poverty and lack of opportunity, alongside violence, are driving forces for youth in the Central American region. U.S. development assistance should support alternatives for youth who are especially vulnerable due to lack of opportunities and multiple forms of violence. Investment in culturally-appropriate, grassroots development that defends basic human rights for all people provides sustainable alternatives to migration for individuals seeking better futures for their families, and reduces the need for costly border enforcement, detention, and deportation systems. In particular, investment in women and girls has a profound multiplier effect that benefits local communities. Instead of investing in large infrastructure projects or extractive industries, we support robust funding for comprehensive community-based development programs that are culturally relevant, and pay particular attention to women's empowerment and child welfare programs. In addition, Economic Support Funds targeted at youth resilience and crime reduction should be scaled up to further build community stability and reduce the necessity for people to migrate.

Ensure adherence to human rights. Congressional funding must end reliance on militarized and armed approaches to the prevention of violence and migration. Instead, funds should be allocated for protection of human rights defenders, strengthening judicial independence, the capacity of prosecutors to independently investigate police and military abuses, and the ability of civil society to hold government actors accountable for corruption and abuse. In regions with widespread corruption, it is impossible to guarantee that U.S. security assistance will be used to support transparency and human rights. To support democratic institutions, it is imperative that the United States avoids funding the training of police and armed forces implicated in human rights abuses and endemic corruption.

Expand refugee protection in the region. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) expansion of in-region protection of internally displaced vulnerable populations has played an important role in strengthening asylum systems in the Northern Triangle of Central America and in Mexico, building up mechanisms to identify and protect the most vulnerable populations, and pursue solutions for internally displaced refugees. We recommend that Congress expand funding for UNHCR endeavors, for NGOs attending to returned migrants, and for shelters along the migration route.

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OVER 1 MILLION PEOPLE

Displaced by violence in Mexico and the Northern Triangle in 2015, almost double the number displaced in 2014

60% OF PEOPLE

Living in rural areas of the Northern Triangle live in poverty

1.5 MILLION SMALL FARMERS

Driven out of work between 1993 and 2005 after U.S. promotion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.
Hebrews 13:2

Our faith communities include people from many countries and many economic backgrounds, and we value our friends' and neighbors' contributions regardless of their wealth, ethnicity, religion, or where they were born. Any meaningful reform of our immigration system must include a fair process that allows existing undocumented immigrants and their families the opportunity to pursue lawful permanent residency and citizenship. The opportunity for attainable citizenship will serve to stabilize families, communities, and local economies, and will reaffirm our national values.

Core values

- Respect for the dignity and contributions of all
- Attainable citizenship for immigrants
- Solutions for DREAMers
- Expanded access to integration services

Proposals that would create a path to temporary lawful status but deny individuals a timely and realistic opportunity to obtain a green card and apply for citizenship would cement an underclass of people who contribute to our society but are ripe for exploitation. Such proposals are inconsistent with our faith values to foster inclusive and engaged communities where immigrants find welcome and all can thrive.

Similarly, legislation must provide solutions for more than a select few. Prioritizing some members of our community while leaving others behind violates the values of our faiths. We expect Congress to work for the common good, keep families together, and grant immigrants of diverse education and skill levels citizenship.

The face of immigration: Widian



My father was raised in a tiny village in Galilee, by loving parents who made a meager living as farmers. My mother, who was raised in an orphanage, married my father at seventeen. During my childhood, my father worked as a mechanic and my mother as a teacher. While our home was filled with love, my parents recognized that their children would have better opportunities for education and advancement in the United States. We came as visitors and overstayed our visa. My parents made many attempts to become "legal," spending money on lawyers who gave us false hope and left us wondering if we were ever going to have the chance to stop living in fear. As a child, I did not quite understand our immigration status; I only knew it was a secret we were never to mention to anyone.

My experience as an undocumented immigrant has informed my commitment to support those most in need. Throughout my years as a social worker, I have had the honor to meet God in at-risk youth, homeless men and women, the elderly, my faith community, friends, family, and strangers. Three months shy of my thirty-first birthday, with no criminal record, having lived in the U.S. at least five consecutive years, having arrived before age 16, and holding an advanced degree, I completed my application for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). But my status is bittersweet as I continue to pray in hopeful expectation that undocumented immigrants all over the country will have the opportunity to live freely in our home.

How do our faith principles inform our policy recommendations?

Meaningful reform that allows existing undocumented immigrants to access a timely, affordable, and reasonable pathway to citizenship. We seek adjustment and naturalization procedures that are affordable, accessible, expedient, and respect due process. Expanding visa availability, increasing the number of ports of entry, allocating resources for more immigration attorneys, and eliminating application backlogs will reduce undue burden on immigrants navigating the immigration system.

Increased access to integration and public benefit services. Financial support to state and local governments and community organizations that offer language and civics education, outreach, and immigration legal assistance help empower immigrants to effectively navigate the system and contribute quickly to their new neighborhoods. Congress should invest in U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office of Citizenship, specifically Immigrant Integration and Citizenship grant programs that help immigrants integrate and pursue citizenship. Extending access to quality, affordable health care, affordable housing, food and nutrition programs, disability assistance, job training, ESL programs, mental health and trauma recovery support, and disaster assistance to everyone, regardless of immigration status, is a core way to live up to the faithful call to love our neighbors.

Solutions for Dreamers. We expect that immigration reform legislation will grant permanent lawful status, including a pathway to citizenship, for those who are undocumented in the United States. In the meantime, we support administrative initiatives that ensure these individuals are not deported to countries unknown to them or away from their families. DACA recipients and all undocumented individuals who have been longtime contributors to American communities should have equitable access to opportunities as their resident and U.S. citizen peers. They should be free to continue their education, pursue vocational aspirations, and contribute to their families and communities free of fear of deportation, while lasting congressional reform is pursued. Congressional legislation must include an expeditious and workable pathway to citizenship.

The guest is a representative of God.

Hindu Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11.2

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OVER 750,000

Number people enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program

80% OF AMERICANS

Support a pathway to citizenship for immigrants meeting certain requirements

McClatchy-Marist poll, March 2017

\$2 TRILLION

The approximate total immigrants added to the U.S. GDP in 2016

2:1 RATIO

Immigrants start businesses at twice the rate of native-born citizens



What our faiths say about BORDER POLICIES

Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all. For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness... rather than fearing the loss of local identity.

Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium

We are called by our many faith traditions to ensure that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. Border security policies should reflect these values and protect human life, tribal sovereignty, sacred sites, and public lands. Respect for human and civil rights in border enforcement policies is essential to safeguarding the integrity of our society. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) must be prepared to engage communities with respect and professionalism. Over the past twenty years, the federal government has dramatically militarized the U.S.-Mexico border, negatively impacting the civil and human rights of border residents, encouraging racial profiling, and sowing distrust and fear between communities and the law enforcement entities they rely upon for protection. Gone largely unchecked, these operations have stifled the economic vitality and overall well-being of U.S. border communities.

Core values

- Treat all individuals and border communities with dignity
- Increase accountability and transparency
- End unsafe deportation practices
- Choose border security strategies that respect the environment, landowners and human rights

Current enforcement practices are devastating our communities and congregations, contributing to the deaths of thousands of migrants traveling in remote desert regions, and violating the rights of U.S. citizens and migrants alike. We recommend that Congress and the Administration radically shift federal priorities for and implementation of border security policies.



The face of immigration

Ignacia was eight months pregnant when she entered the United States near Douglas, Arizona in December. She had been walking a few hours when she fell in the desert and sprained her ankle. She continued to attempt to walk in spite of the pain and was apprehended by Border Patrol agents that same evening. When apprehended, she informed the agents that she was pregnant. However, upon arrival at the Border Patrol Station she was not given any medical attention for either her pregnancy or her sprained ankle. She was only given seemingly undercooked burritos and crackers to eat approximately every six hours. This food was insufficient to

stave off her hunger because of her pregnancy. She requested additional food but the Border Patrol agents did not provide her with more meals or snacks. She also asked to speak with the Mexican consulate but was not given an opportunity. She was deported two days later and arrived in Nogales still in pain from her injured ankle.

Kino Border Initiative filed a complaint on behalf of Ignacia, but the local station found it to be unsubstantiated. According to the Border Patrol station manager, he spoke with the agents who had contact with Ignacia and they said that she did not request medical attention, they did not notice that she was pregnant, and that she did not request additional food. As far as KBI is aware, no other entity of DHS investigated the complaint.

Story contact: Kristen Lionetti, klionetti@jesuits.org

How do our faith principles inform our policy recommendations?

We call on Congress and the Administration to:

Recognize the border as a dynamic home to bi-national communities.

Department of Homeland Security officials should institutionalize engagement with community stakeholders when developing border and enforcement policies and support accountability and oversight mechanisms for CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Abandon increasing barriers and militarization along our southern border in the name of “border security.” Overwhelmingly, border communities have said that border wall or fencing does not help their condition; it does not stem the flow of forced migration, meet critical humanitarian protection needs, or help people navigate a legal system that has not been meaningfully updated in more than 30 years.

Ensure human rights protections at the border. We recommend Congress pass legislation that strengthens oversight, transparency, and accountability measures to ensure CBP officers adhere to law enforcement best practices. Deportation policies must also be reformed to prioritize family unity and ensure safe repatriation.

Protect the civil liberties of border communities. Rein in the 100-mile zone in which CBP currently operates to no more than 25 miles and halt community sweeps, checkpoints, and roadblocks. Furthermore, CBP should be required to establish probable cause before apprehension. Searches of private property and federal lands, including tribal lands, should require a warrant. We recommend regular public reports on CBP activities and regular assessments of CBP activities for efficacy, weighing the impacts on border communities.

Ensure due process for and protection of migrants. Halt the criminal prosecution of migrants for entry and re-entry (formerly known as Operation Streamline), which has led to serious human rights and civil rights violations. Improper entry and re-entry are now the most prosecuted federal offenses in the United States, swelling the ranks of federal prisons and taxing an already overburdened justice system. The Administration should also create a strategy to prevent migrant deaths and improve rescue and recovery efforts along the U.S. Mexico border.

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\$19 BILLION

Immigration enforcement
spending annually

46 FATAL SHOOTINGS

By CBP agents with no
known consequences

**6,300+ MIGRANT
DEATHS**

Along the U.S.-Mexico
border since 1998

**ADDRESS ROOT
CAUSES OF
MIGRATION**

“Push” factors: violent conflict,
natural disasters, economic distress,
persecution, trade policies

“Pull” factors: family, safety,
employment, opportunity

INTERFAITH IMMIGRATION COALITION

What our faiths say about INTERIOR ENFORCEMENT

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

Deuteronomy 10:17-18

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.

Core values

- Treat all individuals with respect and dignity
- Improve access to a fair and humane legal immigration system
- Prioritize family unity
- End collaboration of local police with ICE
- Promote alternatives to detention

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.

Story contact: Rev. Jason Carson Wilson, wilsonj@ucc.org

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

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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