**Talking Points on Family Unity**

* The family unit is the foundation of our nation. As the cornerstone of every community, families hold us together. As communities of faith, we oppose any proposal that would eliminate or weaken current family visa categories. Family unity is the basis of a values-driven immigration system. Our immigration system should recognize the importance of familial relationships, both for individuals and on the community level. We must cut through the rhetoric and be clear that increasing barriers for family unification are not in line with our vision for a compassionate, humane immigration system that keeps families together.
* It is already an incredibly difficult and lengthy process to reunite with family members under our current immigration system. Adding even more barriers to family reunification is unnecessary and cruel. Currently, U.S. citizens are only permitted to sponsor their spouse, children, parents, and siblings. Green card holders are only permitted to sponsor their spouse and unmarried children. While the spouse and minor children of U.S. citizens are not subject to visa “caps,” adult children, siblings, and parents of U.S. citizens and the spouse and children of LPRs are placed into “preference categories” and must wait for a visa to become available. Due to numerical and country-based visa caps, it often takes years – or even decades – for these family members to be reunited. There are no family-based visas for other family members – no one can apply for cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, or other relatives.
* Family-based immigration leads to successful, strong American families, especially as adult children, brothers, and sisters are the support structure that helps run small businesses, meet child care needs, and foster integration. Immigrant families must not be used as bargaining chips in a misleading and misguided attempt to characterize immigration as “zero-sum.” Proposals to curtail or end family-based immigration are part of a dangerous narrative seeking to dehumanize our immigrant brothers and sisters.
* Share stories about your own family and/or families in your congregation or community, and what it would mean if the government prevented people from reuniting with their family.
* At the center of our congregations and communities is the integrity of the familial structure. Many people of faith first learned about the injustices of the immigration system by witnessing families in their congregations suffer through separation due to visa backlogs, detention, and deportation. Proposals that dismantle opportunities for family reunification are diametrically opposed to who we are as communities of faith. We must stand strong to defend family unity. We need real solutions that protect family unity and reunification.
* Biblical representations of family show the sacredness of a unified family. There are many examples of close relationships between adult children and their parents, including Abraham and Isaac, and Mary and Jesus. There are also examples of siblings remaining close as adults: Mary and Martha, and disciples Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John. See next page for more details.
* Families are already being separated. More than 18,800 DACA recipients have lost their protection since DACA was terminated on September 5th - a figure that will skyrocket the longer Congress fails to act. Efforts to create a permanent subclass of immigrant youth, prevent them from sponsoring their parents, drastically cut family-based visas, authorize a wasteful and superfluous border wall, expand mandatory detention, grow the deportation force, and remove critical protections for individuals seeking protection or asylum are not real solutions.
* We support an increase in family-based visas so U.S. citizens and green card holders (lawful permanent residents or LPRs) don't have to wait years or decades to reunite. At minimum, there should be a temporary increase in family visas to clear the current backlog with integrity.
* We support the Reuniting Families Act, which would reform the family-based visa system by:
  + Increasing the per-country cap from seven percent to fifteen percent to reduce backlogs
  + Recapturing unused visas for use in the following year
  + Reclassifying the spouses and minor children of green card holders (LPRs) as immediate relatives and reallocating visas saved to the other existing family categories

**Please visit** [**www.interfaithimmigration.org/family**](http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/family) **for more resources.**

**Familial Bonds are Central to Religious Traditions as Represented in Scripture**

**Social and Historical Context:** Families in the Hebrew Bible were close-knit with strong feelings of family loyalty. The administration of Biblical covenants included a principle of familial inclusion, which became a core value used as a metaphor for a relationship with God. Steadfast love was the basis of the familial covenant, which created a sense of loyalty, justice, and high regard for one another. In the Hebrew Bible, family has the purposes of reproduction, instruction, care giving, maintaining traditions, and conveying wisdom. For the Hebrew family, steadfast love was the heart of loyalty and solidarity. Covenants included all family relationships and have helped maintain the identity of the Hebrew family through today.

**Torah**

**Abraham and Isaac:** The story of Abraham and Isaac shows the value that God places on family. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only son, the most important thing in his life. The surest test of Abraham’s loyalty to the Lord is sacrificing his son. When Abraham shows his obedience, the Lord spares his son and blesses him with plentiful descendants. Family is the risk and family is the reward. (Genesis 22: 1-19)

**Joseph and his Brothers:** The story of Joseph, whose brothers violated the code of family covenant by selling him into slavery, shows the importance of forgiveness and family unity overcoming past wrongs. When Joseph rises to political power in Egypt, he is reunited with his brothers and accepts not only his own family into Egypt, but the entire tribe of Israel, so that they can escape the famine in the land of Canaan. (Genesis 37-50)

**Ruth and Naomi:** This well-known story highlights the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. When Ruth was widowed, she pledged her loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, who had Ruth migrate with her to Bethlehem to help her re-establish herself in a new land. With the assistance of Naomi, Ruth began to work in the fields and was able to eventually marry the landowner wherein she became the great-grandmother to David. The current U.S. immigration system would not recognize the familial relationship between this mother and her daughter-in-law. (Ruth 1 and 2)

**Christian Texts**

**Mary and Jesus:** The relationship between Mary and Jesus throughout his life and especially at the time of his death points to the interconnectedness of familial strength and the fluidity of family relationships. Mary’s courage in the Immaculate Conception showed the dedication and strength of motherhood that continued throughout Jesus’ ministry. Jesus clearly extended his understanding of the family model to include all of his disciples. These individuals are not independent of one another, but rather interconnected and interdependent. This points to how crucial is it to refrain from limiting the definition of family and the power that parents play in the lives of their adult children and vice-versa. (John 19:25-27)

**Mary and Martha:** The story of Mary and Martha displays the reliance that adult siblings can have on one another. Mary and Martha give one another mutual and diverse support. Martha welcomes Jesus into their home, which is an important action for Jesus and Mary’s relationship. Martha points out that she needs Mary to help her do her work, exhibiting how adult siblings can depend on one another. Mary, however, is able to most fully understand and appreciate Jesus’ presence; thereby teaching Martha an important lesson. The interdependence and wisdom that blossoms from these adult sisters’ relationship is one so powerful that they are mentioned by name in multiple places in scripture. (Luke 10:38-42)

**The Twelve Disciples:** At least half of the twelve disciples were brothers and many more siblings were part of the larger following of Jesus. Jesus calls two pairs of brothers to follow him in his ministry. The first thing that Andrew does after he meets Jesus is share the news with his brother, Simon Peter, and together they become disciples of Jesus. The dependence and support between siblings is apparent in the story of James and John. They are fisherman together and followers of Jesus together. Jesus finds them fishing and asks that they follow him. This decision is a joint venture between the brothers. They are reliant on one another’s support and trust themselves to follow Jesus together. Jesus does not collect one sibling and leave the other behind. He shows the value of sibling relationships by inviting both to follow him. As more disciples gather there is a sense that the family structure is extended to all followers, as sisters and brothers. (Matthew 4:18–22 and 10:1-4; Mark 2:14 and 3:16-19; Luke 6:12-16; John 1:35-42)