

A Call to Justice and Mercy in Response to Anti-Immigrant Federal Policies

Issued by
A Consortium of Justice Advocacy Groups and Organizations*
in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of The United Methodist Church

In the sacrament of Baptism and in our church's liturgy for receiving new members, each congregation and its members commit themselves to the love and care of each person, to "do all in our power to increase their faith, confirm their hope and perfect them in love." With gratitude we respond in commitment and affirmation for all that God has done in each individual's life and we "welcome them in Christian love."¹

Over the past weeks, we have witnessed and read reports of immigrant families across the country being torn apart as this current Presidential administration attempts to implement its mass deportation orders, actions which have been devastating to many families and to congregations that minister in and with immigrant communities. The detention of a United Methodist Lay Leader in Kansas, a Sunday School teacher and "Dreamer" in Arizona, and members of one of our own mission congregations in the Warrington/Warminster area of Pennsylvania are just beginning offenses that show how deeply felt the repercussions of this extreme policy are in the lives of those we vow to love and care for.

We are warned by the prophet Isaiah that God despises unjust laws:

*Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees,
who write oppressive statutes
to turn aside the needy from justice,
and to rob the poor of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil,
and that you may make the orphans your prey!* (Isaiah. 10: 1-2)

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reminds us that we serve as true disciples when we serve others:

*"For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me."* (Matthew 25:35)

As members and organizations in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, we stand committed to the call of Jesus Christ and to the mission of The United Methodist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, and

We urge United Methodist individuals and local congregations to recommit:

- to live out our membership and baptismal vows as we strive to perfect one another in love;
- to honor our historic Methodist legacy of commitment to justice and mercy for those who are poor and displaced;
- to bear one another's burdens and fulfilling the law of Christ, which is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Galatians 5:14, 6:2);
- to faithfully witness through our words and deeds against injustice in all forms;
- to fulfill Jesus' new commandment that we "love one another" (John 13:34)

- to accompany Bishop Peggy Johnson at the Prayer Vigil at Berks Detention Center in Leesport, Pa., on March 12 (at 3:30 p.m.), and to join in other actions to support detained immigrants;
- to use resources provided by our conference's Rapid Response Team to facilitate conversations, studies and sermon series on the realities of immigration;
- to develop ministries of *acompañamiento*^[2], mercy and advocacy with immigrants, including becoming sanctuary churches; and
- to become sensitive to the needs of children—many of them American citizens—who are caught in the middle of federal mass deportation policies.

We recall God's promises—which we have inherited from generation to generation—to protect the immigrant. When the [Israelites] were few in number— insignificant, just immigrants—wandering from nation to nation, from one kingdom to the next, God didn't let anyone oppress them. God punished rulers for their sake: "Don't touch my anointed ones; don't harm my prophets!" (Psalm 105:12-14 CEB)

In this Call to Justice and Mercy, we acknowledge our role as wanderers, walking humbly with our God and accepting God's call to do justice and love mercy. Moreover, we continue to serve faithfully a God of all peoples in many places.

***A Consortium of Justice Advocacy Groups and Organizations
in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of The United Methodist Church**

- Board of Church and Society
- Commission on Religion and Race
- The Urban Commission
- Metro Ministries
- United Methodist Women
- Latino Commission
- Black Methodists for Church Renewal
- Methodist Federation for Social Action
- Reconciling Ministries Network
- Rapid Response Team on Immigration

^[1] *The Baptismal Covenant*, The United Methodist Hymnal. Pg. 43 The United Methodist Publishing House, Nashville TN. 1989.

^[2] ***Acompañamiento***, is a theological concept used in the Latino community to refer to our commitment to walk in solidarity with the most vulnerable and marginal people, particularly the poor, the immigrant and the stranger. (See *Caminemos con Jesús: Hacia una teología del acompañamiento* by Roberto S. Goizueta).