

THE
Episcopal
CHURCH

welcomes you



JUSTICE *and* ADVOCACY MINISTRIES

WELCOMING *the* STRANGER
ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

AUGUST RECESS 2014



“Remember in prayer all who flee persecution and suffering in search of security and peace, remember the baptismal promise to strive for justice and peace, and reaffirm our commitment to welcoming the stranger as Christ himself”

- THE MOST REV. DR. KATHARINE JEFFERTS SCHORI



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Dear friends,

Last year at this time, the United States Congress was poised to reform our nation's immigration system. While differences in opinion were deeply felt and plentiful, both in Congress and across America, there was a shared sense that the current system could not and should not stand, and that the time to act was at hand. Twelve months later, however, the need for reform remains urgent, but the national conversation has lost its way. Rather than discussing how we can improve our immigration system so that it serves families, business, and communities more effectively and more humanely, the discussion now focuses on repealing humanitarian laws and enacting barriers to prevent the arrival of vulnerable men, women and, most notably, children arriving at the southern border of the United States. These people have been forced from their homes by escalating violence and instability in Central America, and are literally fleeing for their lives.

Amidst the frenzied discussions of “stemming the flow,” “turning the tide,” and “stopping the surge,” however, Episcopalians have responded to the needs of these children and families quickly and without fanfare. Whether you have met families at bus stations with needed food and hygiene supplies, donated supplies, helped migrants released from detention reunite with family, contacted your elected officials, offered pastoral care to unaccompanied children and detained adults, or held these migrants and the communities serving them in prayer, Episcopalians have responded to this human need through loving service. As members of Congress return home for August to meet with their constituents and host discussions in your communities, your voices of compassion and justice will be needed more than ever. As Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori stated in her remarks in response to the humanitarian crisis at our southern border, “We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keeper, and as a Church, we are asking the United States government to support such a response, grounded in justice and the fundamental dignity of every human being.” These children and families, brothers and sisters in Christ, need not only our service and compassion but our voice.



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The resources and ideas in this toolkit, gathered from leaders across the Church, staff, and interfaith partners, are intended to help you raise that voice. We are especially grateful to the Rev. Gay Jennings, President of the House of Deputies, for providing a letter of introduction that we hope, in particular, will help leverage advocacy by the Episcopalians who will serve as deputies to the 78th General Convention next summer. President Jennings, like the Presiding Bishop and Bishop Stacy Sauls, The Episcopal Church's Chief Operating Officer, has been forthright throughout this debate in reminding Episcopalians that our commitment to the dignity of those arriving at our borders flows directly from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our office is honored to support the transformational work Episcopalians throughout this Church are undertaking to change the unjust structure of our immigration system and to welcome vulnerable people fleeing harm. Thank you for all that you do.

In faith,

Alexander D. Baumgarten
Director of Justice and
Advocacy Ministries

Katie Conway
Immigration and Refugee
Policy Analyst



IMMIGRATION REFORM

Background and resources

In June 2013, the Senate passed the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744). Passing with a large bipartisan margin of 68-32, this bill would reform our broken immigration system by reuniting families, offering a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented people, and enhancing protections for vulnerable migrants and refugees. While The Episcopal Church voiced grave concerns over the increased interior and border enforcement provisions of the bill, it provided an opportunity for meaningful reform of a system that does not serve our families, communities, or our economy.

In the year since S.744 passed, many immigration bills have been introduced in the House of Representatives, but the reform many hoped was at hand has not materialized. House leadership has refused to bring substantive immigration bills to the floor, despite widespread support at the grassroots and grass tops levels. In the meantime, the Obama administration has continued to deport undocumented immigrants at alarming rates, sowing fear throughout immigrant communities and tearing families apart. Amidst ongoing outcry from the immigrant, faith, business, and labor communities, deportations under President Obama surpassed 2 million in the spring, prompting the Administration to call for an administrative review of immigration enforcement policies. This review is expected to result in significant administrative action by the end of the summer.

The Episcopal Church remains committed to finding a legislative resolution and to working with all partners willing to meaningfully reform our immigration laws so that they protect families, offer access to citizenship, and respect the dignity of all human beings. In the absence of legislation, however, The Episcopal Church urges administration officials to use the authority they hold to pursue policies that keep families together, offer avenues of protection for those fleeing persecution, and to ensure that enforcement policies are proportional and humane. These guiding principles are informed by the experiences of Episcopalians in immigrant and refugee communities, where the price of inaction is visible every day. The following resolutions passed by Executive Council and General Convention guide the immigration and refugee advocacy of The Episcopal Church.



Citizenship

For the majority of the 11 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States, there is no accessible legal pathway through which they can adjust their status and therefore remain with their families and seek lawful employment. The Episcopal Church supports nothing less than a pathway to full citizenship for undocumented immigrants wishing to come out of the shadows and will not support overly punitive measures, such as making legalization contingent upon enforcement measures, or restricting access to basic civil rights afforded to citizens, such as voting, accessing child tax credits, or sponsoring family members.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Urge the U.S. Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform to give undocumented persons who have established roots in the United States a pathway to legalization and full social and economic integration into the United States. (GC '09)
- Adopt the fundamental principles that undocumented immigrants should have reasonable opportunity to pursue permanent residency; legal workers should be allowed to enter the U.S. to respond to recognized labor force needs; close family members should be allowed to reunite without undue delay with individuals lawfully present in the U.S.; fundamental principles of legal due process should be granted to all persons and enforcement of national borders and immigration policies should be proportional and humane. Furthermore, The Episcopal Church deplores any action on behalf of the government, which unduly emphasizes enforcement, including militarization of the border between the United States and Mexico. (GC '06)

Protection for refugees and other vulnerable migrants

The Episcopal Church supports a robust refugee resettlement program for those fleeing their countries to escape persecution, oppression, and war. Through Episcopal Migration Ministries, our Church has worked in public-private partnership with the U.S. Government to resettle thousands of refugees since the inception of the program in 1980. In the decades since this ministry to “welcome the stranger” began, however, we have welcomed an ev-



er-diversifying refugee population, including refugees from more than 69 nationalities, and an increasing number of refugees with serious medical conditions; refugees who are victims of torture and severe sexual-gender based violence; increased numbers of unaccompanied immigrant children; and more single female heads of household. The Episcopal Church is committed to welcoming all refugees to peaceful homes and hopeful futures in the United States, but the laws that govern our refugee resettlement program and immigration system must change if the United States is to continue as the world leader in humanitarian resettlement.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Urge the United States Congress to reform the Refugee Act of 1980 in order to modernize the nation's refugee program, including modernizations such as, but not limited to, meeting the urgent needs of a diverse refugee population through specialized and extended case management; culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services; recertification assistance for refugees with a professional background; restoration of federal benefits from 8 months to at least one year; housing and transportation assistance; and other innovative policies that create sustainable integration pathways for refugees. (GC '12)
- Urge the U.S. government to extend the protection of asylum to vulnerable peoples, especially women fleeing mutilation or cultural practices that deny their full humanity. (EC 2/04)

The DREAM Act

The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act would provide a path to legal status for undocumented youth who arrived in this country as infants or children and have grown up as members of our communities. The Episcopal Church strongly supports the DREAM Act. This act would provide immigrant youth the opportunity to pursue higher education and/or serve the United States so that they can become fully contributing members of our communities and eventually become citizens of the United States. Every child growing up in America deserves the opportunity to grow into full stature as a member



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of our society and to achieve his or her dreams. Withholding legal status from these children not only hurts them, but it deprives America of future generations of dedicated citizens, innovators, entrepreneurs, and public servants. Without legislative reform, administrative programs such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals should be renewed, allowing these members of our communities to study and work free from the threat of deportation.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Support federal legislation that presents a pathway to citizenship for undocumented youth and young adults while assisting undocumented youth, known as “DREAMers,” in accessing higher education. (GC ‘12)
- Urge the U.S. government to allow undocumented youth who arrive as infants or children to pursue higher education and/or serve in the military in order to contribute to their communities and become citizens. (GC ‘09)

Enforcement

The Episcopal Church supports proportional and humane immigration enforcement policies that respect the dignity and worth of every human being. Those who break our immigration laws in order to do us harm need to be prevented from doing so, but the increased militarization of the border, programs that encourage racial profiling, and prison-like detention for migrants is not the solution. The Episcopal Church supports alternatives to costly and prison-like detention for individuals who pose no threat to public safety, and the end to programs that separate families and erode trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities, such as the 287-g and the Secure Communities program.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Decry the use of racial profiling as a reason to question an individual’s immigration status and call for the immediate end to the Secure Communities program, which leads to lengthy detention of immigrants who have no serious charges against them and discourages victims of crimes, such as domestic abuse, from reporting those crimes. (GC ‘12)



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- Urge the U.S. government to terminate any program that allows or funds local law enforcement agencies' enforcement of immigration law, thereby allowing immigrant victims of crime to report it without fear of deportation. (GC '09)
- Urge the U.S. government to establish a moratorium on roadside checkpoints and raids carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that tear families apart. (GC '09)
- Urge the U.S. government to ensure that undocumented immigrant detainees are provided with humane treatment, adequate food and medical care, and sanitary conditions. (GC '09)
- Urge the U.S. government to consider alternatives to a costly prison-like detention system for immigrants. (GC '09)

Benefits for immigrants

The Episcopal Church believes that immigrants should not be unfairly barred from accessing benefits, such as coverage under the Affordable Care Act or federal student loans.

RESOLUTIONS:

- Urge the U.S. government to ensure that needy immigrants are not unfairly denied essential services and benefits. (GC '97)
- Support a welfare system that does not discriminate on the basis of marital status, age, legal immigrant status, or ability to identify other parent. (EC 2/95)

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

We Episcopalians know that welcoming the stranger among us is one of our greatest responsibilities and joys. For more than twenty-five years, the General Convention of The Episcopal Church has called for immigration measures that would give to undocumented immigrants the dignity and respect that we all possess as citizens of the realm of God.

At the 77th General Convention in July 2012, The Episcopal Church expressed its concern about United States [refugee policy](#) and [unjust immigration enforcement](#). Now these issues are in the spotlight, as more than 52,000 children fleeing violence have streamed over our southern border. Many of them are making a dangerous journey by themselves to escape murder rates and gang violence in Central America, particularly El Salvador and Honduras, that are unparalleled except in countries at war.

People sometimes ask me what difference the social justice resolutions of General Convention make. This summer, with your help, they can make a difference in the lives of these refugee children.

President Obama has asked Congress for \$3.7 billion in additional funding to handle the crisis, and his proposals included welcome steps to help stop the violence in Central American countries. But his administration has also moved to hasten deportations and discourage people from seeking asylum and protection, even though many of the children crossing the U. S. border are fleeing horrific violence and should therefore be treated as refugees.

Even the President's incomplete response to the crisis is likely to be hamstrung in Congress by politicians more focused on mid-term elections than on children in crisis. It is troubling that many of these elected officials invoke their faith as they campaign for office on platforms of exclusion and fear. People of faith, however, know better and must act and advocate accordingly.

We are called upon not only to be charitable, but also to go beyond charity. We must oppose the false choice being offered by those who want to prevent refugee children from entering the country. "We can't start taking care of others if we can't take care of our own," a protester near San Diego told the Desert Sun newspaper, articulating the widespread belief that we live in a world of scarcity and must hoard for ourselves rather than share with others.

Every faith refutes this claim: Christians are instructed to do to others as we would have others do to us, Jews to heal the world, Buddhists to have compassion for all who suffer, Muslims to devote a portion of their income to caring for the poor, and the list goes on. Eight-seven percent of Americans say they belong to a religion, and nothing in the holy books of those faiths teaches us to turn these children away. We must insist that the debate in Washington is not simply about treating refugees with compassion, but ensures that we hear their claims, safeguard their futures, and offer their countries the assistance necessary to restore peace at home.

The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings
PRESIDENT of the HOUSE OF DEPUTIES



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The staff of the Office of Government Relations has compiled the research and advocacy tips in this packet to help Episcopalians across the country meet with our members of Congress while they are home for their August recess. I know from experience that our elected representatives take note when their constituents are passionate enough about an issue to ask for a meeting. They sit up and pay close attention when they understand that we are there because of our faith in a God who longs for justice and mercy.

In our Baptismal Covenant, we have promised to strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. Advocacy for just public policy is one way of fulfilling that commitment, and the witness of General Convention guides our way. Especially in this moment of crisis for so many children fleeing across our southern border, I pray that in how we act and in what we advocate, we will be worthy of our beliefs.

Faithfully,



The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings
President, House of Deputies

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CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRATION CRISIS

Background

Since 2011, the number of unaccompanied immigrant children making the dangerous journey from Central America to the southern border of the United States has increased more than seven-fold, with arrivals exceeding 60,000 children this year. These children, many under the age of 12, are fleeing pervasive and inescapable violence in their home countries of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. These countries are three of the most violent countries on the planet; Honduras has the highest murder rate in the world, with El Salvador and Guatemala ranking third and eighth respectively. Within these communities of diminishing protections and escalating violence, children, single women, and women heads of household with young children are the most vulnerable and are therefore prime targets for violence and exploitation by the organized crime syndicates, gangs, and security forces. In all three countries, gangs, transnational criminal organizations, and narcotraffickers commit acts of violence with near impunity, while local police forces are either unable or unwilling to offer protection to the public. The State Department actually advises Americans against travel to Honduras or El Salvador, citing specifically the “critically high” levels of violence and inability of police to protect travelers or citizens.¹

When children flee their homes, however, the risks they face at the hands of traffickers, gangs, criminals, and state actors continue along the journey. The unique vulnerabilities of children have long been recognized under U.S. and international law, which is why in 2002 the care of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) was moved from the Department of Homeland Security to the Office of Refugee Resettlement within Health and Human Services. The goal of the Unaccompanied Alien Children program, which served between 6,000-8,000 children a year before 2011, is to provide holistic, child-centered care for children arriving alone at U.S. borders. Once children cross the border, they are placed in the custody of ORR where the needs and the best interests of the children are assessed. On average, children remain in ORR custody for 30 days before they are either reunited with

1 Accessed 7/27/14 U.S. Department of State “Honduras Travel Warning” 24 June 2014. Web 28 July 2014. <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/honduras-travel-warning.html>



family in the U.S., returned to their country of origin, or it is determined that they qualify for immigration status as an asylum seeker, victim of human trafficking or other serious crime, or other humanitarian relief programs. Some children without family in the U.S. are placed in foster care programs.

The crisis in Central America's Northern Triangle, however, is not just about children but about adults and families as well. In recent weeks, tens of thousands of women with children and other family units fleeing the pervasive violence of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras have arrived in Texas and Arizona. Lacking the space to detain these families, many have been left at Greyhound stations² in communities across the southern border once they have been apprehended and released with a notice to appear in immigration court months or even years later. The United States is currently expanding family detention to house these newly arriving families, despite previously moving away from this inhumane and costly practice due to lawsuits and reports of abuse and mismanagement in family detention centers.³ Meanwhile, other stable countries in the region such as Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize, have reported that asylum requests from Honduran, Guatemalan, and Salvadorian nationals are up 712% since 2008, reinforcing the sustained and regional nature of this migration crisis.

Additional background resources:

Episcopal News Service : <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2014/07/15/el-salvador-violence-insecurity-impunity-lead-to-displacement/>

Immigration Advocacy Network July 1 Newsletter: <http://library.episcopalchurch.org/article/immigration-advocacy-newsletter-july-2014>

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- 2 Belson, Ken and Fausset, Richard. "Faces of an Immigration System Overwhelmed by Women and Children" *The New York Times*, June 5, 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/06/us/faces-of-an-immigration-system-overwhelmed-by-women-and-children.html>
 - 3 Locking Up Family Values, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, 2007 <http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/RPTLOCKINGUPFAMILYVALUES2007.pdf>



Policy proposals

There are many policy proposals in front of Congress that seek to address the rise in arrivals of unaccompanied immigrant children and families at the southern border of the United States. The majority incorrectly attribute the root cause of the crisis to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA) of 2008, and therefore seek to repeal or weaken its provisions related to protecting unaccompanied children from Central America. In recognition of migrant children's vulnerabilities, the 2008 re-authorization of the TVPRA enhanced protections for unaccompanied minors and required that each child arriving from noncontiguous countries be screened in an individualized and appropriate manner for trafficking and asylum-related concerns. If changes to this law are pushed through Congress, however, children will lose their meaningful opportunity to have their story heard and apply for asylum, or be cared for by child welfare personnel as they pursue their protection claim. Instead, they would face deportation to potentially life-threatening situations at the hands of traffickers and gangs, which is the flawed process currently in place for Mexican children.

An immediate response to this crisis is needed, but removing key protections from bipartisan legislation, especially at a time when more children are in need of these life-saving protections, is the wrong response. Rooted in the protection of vulnerable children and the regional scope of this humanitarian crisis, The Episcopal Church urges Congress to support legislation that will:

- Ensure that the wellbeing of vulnerable children is the driving force behind our policy response. Children should not be treated as an enforcement priority but should have access to child welfare personnel, legal counsel, and the services they need to navigate the immigration system. The TVPRA and other laws governing the protection and care for these children should not be changed and increases to family detention should be opposed.
- Provide vital funding for refugee services in FY14 and FY15. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within Health and Human Services is the office that provides lifesaving support services to resettled refugees, asylees, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa recipients, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and survivors of human trafficking and torture.



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ORR is also responsible for providing care for unaccompanied immigrant children, and earlier this summer \$94 million was reprogrammed away from services to refugees in order to care for rising numbers of unaccompanied children. ORR needs at least \$1.2 billion in additional funding in 2014 to care for vulnerable children and replenish reprogrammed funds. The U.S. must show leadership by protecting unaccompanied children while maintaining our commitment to refugee resettlement and serving all of the populations within ORR's mandate equally by providing additional funding in FY14 and robust funding in FY15.

- Avoid conflating the need for emergency funding with sweeping policy decisions. The violence in Central America that has displaced millions and forced tens of thousands of children to flee is an emergency situation that requires an emergency response. Without additional funding for ORR, refugees and other vulnerable groups, and the communities that welcome them across the country, will face significant impacts as early as August 2014. Changes to immigration policy decisions that reduce due process for children, however, signify a significant and weighty change in U.S. humanitarian policy and law. Changes of this magnitude must be considered carefully and deliberately on their own.

How you can help

In addition to taking action through the Episcopal Public Policy Network (<http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/home>) in support of vulnerable immigrant children, families, and all refugees, there are many ways to get involved in the church-wide response.

Donate

Episcopal Migration Ministries has established a fund for monetary donations to assist dioceses, congregations, and its affiliate network partners that are working with these populations in the impacted areas and across the country. You may send your gift to "DFMS," memo line "Child Migrant response," to Episcopal Migration Ministries, 815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017.



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Additionally, the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas is on the frontline of compassionate response to Central American children and families who have been released from detention and are on their way to their next destination. The Diocese has established a fund to receive all monetary contributions for this work, led by St. John's, McAllen and Christ Church, Laredo. Checks should be made out to the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas, noted for Emergency Relief. They can be mailed to: Episcopal Diocese of West Texas, P.O. Box 6885, San Antonio, TX 78209. For more information, visit: <http://www.dwtx.org/departments-ministries/communications/dwtx-blog/immigration-situation-in-south-texas-appeal> (<http://bit.ly/1lNMG9n>).

Act

Mapping the Church's Response: Across the country and The Episcopal Church, congregations and individuals are engaging in a compassionate response to the Central American migrant children situation. We are updating a nation-wide map as information becomes available. Is your diocese, congregation, or wider community responding to the crisis? Please tell us; email emm@episcopalchurch.org.

Immigration Services: Pro-bono immigration services are in high demand and Episcopal Migration Ministries is currently compiling a roster of immigration attorneys. If you are an attorney and would like to get on the roster, or if you are interested in additional immigration law training, please email us at emm@episcopalchurch.org.

Foster Care: Episcopal Migration Ministries refers inquiries about foster care for unaccompanied immigrant children to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) department of Migrant and Refugee Services. LIRS and USCCB are the only agencies in the United States designated to provide foster care services to unaccompanied immigrant children.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT FOSTER CARE SERVICES FOR
UNACCOMPANIED IMMIGRANT CHILDREN:

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

please call or email migratingchildren@usccb.org, 202-541-3081

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service:

www.lirs.org/fostercare; email fosterparentinfo@lirs.org, 410-230-2757

Brochure about Foster Care of Unaccompanied Immigrant Children (<http://bit.ly/1kfnSgL>)

Frequently Asked Questions about Foster Care (<http://bit.ly/1rFBPqk>)

Post-Release Services: The Austin Office of Refugee Services of Texas is an affiliate of Episcopal Migration Ministries. While only an Episcopal Migration Ministries affiliate through its Austin office, Refugee Services of Texas has its own five-city network of service providers in Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, Ft. Worth, and Houston. The RST-Houston office provides post-release services to children and families who have been released from detention. You can support their work by visiting www.rstx.org/houston.

Foundation Cristosal: Foundation Cristosal (<http://cristosal.org/>) is a human rights-based community development organization with Anglican/Episcopal roots. It works in El Salvador to strengthen the ability of the poor to act for justice and development as equal citizens in a democratic society. Cristosal's Human Rights Office meets one-on-one with Salvadorans and their families who are threatened by violence and are seeking refugee status internationally. Their work also focuses on addressing the root causes of violence and poverty in El Salvador that force families to flee or send family members abroad. Access the resources below to learn more about its valuable work.

Foundation Cristosal: [July 24, 2014 news update](#)

Episcopal News Service: [El Salvador: Violence, insecurity, impunity lead to displacement, Faith-based NGOs respond](#) (<http://bit.ly/1tKrOG4>)

To learn more about Cristosal, email info.cristosal@gmail.com, or call toll free at (315) 307-0005.



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VISIT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES, NEIGHBOR *to* NEIGHBOR

Why call them neighbor to neighbor visits?

Bringing together a delegation of faith and community leaders to establish and nurture relationships with your senators and representatives is crucial if we are to change the “unjust structures” within our society. When members of Congress know that their constituents care about refugees, family unity, humane enforcement, and immigrants’ rights, they vote accordingly. As both representatives and members of your communities, every senator and representative has an office – often multiple offices – in their home states. Visits to these offices are an impactful way to speak, neighbor to neighbor, with your representatives and let them know why and how the laws and policies that affect refugees and immigrants affect your community.

Purpose of neighbor to neighbor in-district visits

1. To fulfill the promise of our baptismal covenant and “strive for justice and peace.” Neighbor-to-neighbor visits put faith into action by demanding that senators and representative understand that we, as constituents and people of faith, want to see compassionate and just immigration policies enacted.
2. To persuade your senators and representative to vote for policies that protect vulnerable people seeking peace and safety, prioritize family unity for all families, and provide a pathway to full citizenship for the undocumented members of our community.
3. To build relationships between people of faith and the public officials who make decisions that impact our communities.

It is helpful to meet with your senators and representative as often as you can. Educating your decision-makers about the role your congregation and/or interfaith partnerships play in the strength and health of the community takes time, but these personal connections are capable of changing someone’s mind and stance on an issue, and are essential to making our communities more welcoming.



Your neighbor to neighbor visit:

BEFORE THE VISIT

Organize a team: Before you meet with your senators and representative, get a team together. A team ideally includes faith leaders, service providers and/or people whose lives have been directly impacted by the immigration system. Be strategic in finding team members who best represent your community’s “ask” - are you meeting with your representative to discuss the care of unaccompanied immigrant children? Do you have anyone in your congregation or network with child welfare expertise or a personal story? If you are discussing the importance of immigration reform, can you share a story of how the broken immigration system has affected your community, or bring someone who can share that perspective? Talking services for refugees and/or immigrants? See if you can find a service provider to share their experiences. And don’t forget to engage community leaders who the senator or representative may already know and respect.

Building a team makes advocacy more sustainable, as you can commit as a group to ongoing outreach within your community and ongoing relationship building with your members of Congress. Think of the impacted communities in your area – recent immigrant communities or congregations and refugee communities – and reach out and ask a leader or representative from those communities to join your team. Not sure where to start? Episcopal Migration Ministries is located in 26 dioceses across the Church – find out if they are located near you: http://www.episcopalmigrationministries.org/where_we_work/emm_affiliate_network_map.aspx.

Aim for 5-10 participants for a visit, though a larger group can be a powerful sign of support for the issue. If you are considering bringing a larger group, check with the member’s scheduler to see how many people the office can accommodate, and be sure your meeting is well-planned so that you are focused on your message and everyone knows their specific role.

1. Find out who represents you in Congress and get to know your audience: Go to <http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/home> to find out who your senators and representative are. Find out where they stand on the issue important to you, including past votes on pieces of refugee and immigration legislation that are important to you. Their websites and a quick Google search will show how they vote and what they have said,



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as well as biographical sketches, campaign statements, district demographics, occupation, religion, political and social memberships, areas of interest, and positions on other issues, all of which can inform your approach to the meeting. For specific bills, www.thomas.loc.gov is a good resource.

2. Have a plan: Meetings with decision-makers should always be tied to your larger advocacy strategy, since meetings are just one of many activities important to creating more welcoming communities. Before you visit your members, always meet with the other participants to assign roles, including the facilitator, the personal story, specific issue points, and the “ask.” Practice by role-playing before the day of your meeting so that everyone feels comfortable with their role and knows what to do. Review your talking points and prepare your materials. Consider bringing materials such as statements from specific faith groups and news clippings of relevant local events. It can be tempting to try and cover every piece of the immigration system important to your community, but keep the message clear, concise, and consistent. You can always follow-up with the office to discuss related topics and share resources. After all, you are building this relationship meeting by meeting — so keep in touch with the office!

SUGGESTED MEETING ROLES:

The Facilitator will kick off the meeting by introducing your group, explaining the purpose for the meeting, and providing space for each person attending to briefly introduce themselves. Make sure each participant introduces which congregation and/or organization they represent. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.

The Personal Story is key to every meeting. Someone should be present who has either been directly impacted by the broken immigration system, has worked closely with those who have been separated from family members by outdated or insufficient laws, has been or has had family members who have been detained or deported, or has otherwise worked closely with the refugee community. Telling this story will show how peoples’ lives are impacted and how your community needs immigration reform.



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Specific Issue Points: There will be specific points your group will want to make about our immigration laws, such as, but not limited to, the importance of protecting the right to family unity and a pathway to full citizenship, and what those mean to your community. It will be helpful to have one person take on each of these issues to show they are distinctly important. Present a brief two minute reflection from a faith perspective on why immigrants' rights are an important issue for your congregation.

The Ask is the critical part of the visit when you ask, "Can we count on your support for _____ (unaccompanied immigrant children; immigration reform that prioritizes family unity for all families and provides a pathway to full citizenship)?" Listen carefully and ask for clarification if what they say is vague.

3. Schedule a meeting. Call, email, or fax the local offices of your senators and representatives to request a meeting with the member to discuss immigration. Make sure to tell them how many other faith leaders and community members would like to attend with you. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with a staffer who works on immigration issues. Be persistent and don't be discouraged if you need to follow-up in order to get a meeting scheduled.

DURING THE VISIT

Below is a suggested framework, but please adapt it to fit your team, your stories, and your member of Congress.

Introductions: The Facilitator should start the meeting by thanking the member for their time, introducing the group as a whole, and then having each person introduce themselves.

People of faith throughout _____ (town/city/state) are committed to acting out our faith by being good neighbors to immigrant families. We do this by _____ (Include a story of the work you or other faith groups in your community have done in support of refugees and immigrants – anything from ESL classes, to legal clinics, to days of prayer, to donations to a diocese working on the southern border, to advocacy, to other ministries.)

We count you, Senator/Representative _____, as our neighbor, too. We commend you for demonstrating the hospitality of our community by



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_____ (Find some comments or legislation the member has worked on in support of immigrant and/or refugee communities.)

We'd also like to ask how you plan to be a good neighbor to immigrant workers and families going forward, especially as we respond to the humanitarian crisis in Central America and look to create a just and compassionate immigration system.

Personal Story: Share a personal story showing the need for immigration reform.

Specific Issue Points: Provide the member the materials you prepared and explain why specific issues, such as family unity and a path to full citizenship, are important to your communities.

Path to Full Citizenship – Currently, there are very few ways for someone who is undocumented, including undocumented youth, to become documented. Immigration reform must create a process by which undocumented immigrants can earn lawful permanent residency with a pathway to full citizenship. This would allow our immigrant neighbors who already contribute to our community to fully participate in our society with the same rights that we enjoy.

Family Unity – Families are the basic unit of strong communities. Thousands of families have been separated by detention and deportation, and should be reunited. Lengthy visa backlogs and punitive policies such as the 3 and 10 year bar force people to choose between being separated for extended periods of time, illegally entering the country, or having to choose between the people and the country they love. Immigration reform must strengthen the family immigration system for all families, including same gender domestic partners and spouses of U.S. citizens and LPRs.

Humanitarian Principles - Our current “enforcement first” model of immigration law has led to record deportations, record spending on interior enforcement and border security, and hundreds of thousands of families being torn apart. We seek an immigration system that recognizes the inherent dignity of every human being, keeps humanitarian values at the center of our policies, and protects families from undue separation.



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The enforcement first model is especially dangerous when applied to children fleeing violence and seeking safety in the United States. The well-being of vulnerable children must remain the driving force behind our policy response. Children should not be treated as an enforcement priority but should have access to child welfare personnel, legal counsel, and the services they need to navigate the immigration system. The TVPRA and other laws governing the protection and care for these children should not be changed and increases to family detention should be opposed.

Make your ask: We believe that in order to truly be good neighbors to immigrants living and working in our communities, we must recognize the contributions and value they bring. Can we count on your support? How can we best support you in our mutual goal?

Listen well and take notes. Much of advocacy involves listening, providing opportunities for the member to ask questions, looking for indications of the member's views, and finding opportunities to provide helpful information or correct misinformation. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard instead of only being talked at. Ask questions and engage in conversation. Answer questions honestly. If you don't know the answer, say that you don't know but you will find out. Assign one person in the group to follow-up.

Leave Behind Materials: Bring with you educational information, policy recommendations, sign-on letters, charts, studies, faith resolutions, etc., all within a packet of resources to leave behind with the member's office. There are many helpful resources at the back of this toolkit.

Thank you and invitation to a community event:

Thank you for your time and support. We will be hosting _____ (clothing drive, prayer vigil, ESL class). Can we count on your attendance? In the meantime, please let us know how we can be a support to you as we all come together in _____ (town/city/state) to be good neighbors and a welcoming community.

Remember to get the contact information and cards for the staffers you meet. Consider asking the member and staff to take a photo with your group – most politicians love the photo op!



AFTER THE VISIT

Debrief your meeting

It's important to make sure you are all on the same page immediately after leaving the meeting while the conversation is fresh in your mind. Make sure to leave the office building so your debrief conversation can't be overheard. As a group, review: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? Choose one person to send a follow-up email attaching the documents mentioned, providing answers to questions that came up during the meeting, and continuing to engage the member and staff in your group's work. It's also important to evaluate your group's work. How did we do as a team? Share the information learned during your meeting with your state coalition and other allies.

Communicate with your base

Make sure to take notes and report back how the meeting went to other groups with whom you are working with. The information from your meeting will inform your next steps on strategic action and is important for those who couldn't come to the meeting to feel included in the process.

Follow up with your member of Congress

Send the staff you met an email thanking them for their time, attaching any documents you mentioned, providing answers to questions that came up during the meeting, and restating your specific issue points.

Call Washington, DC

Call the Interfaith Immigration call-in line at 1-866-940-2439 or the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 to be connected to the DC offices of your senators and representatives. Introduce yourself as a constituent and ask for the staffer who works on immigration. Tell them about your meeting with their local office, ask what they are doing to champion immigration reform, and urge them to support humane immigration policies. Oftentimes the local and DC offices do not communicate about visits, so it's important to follow up with the DC office as well.

Our staff in the Office of Government Relations in DC and our interfaith partners can then follow up with the DC staff to reinforce the importance of the issues you raised your visit!



MAKING YOUR VOICE HEARD *in* TOWN HALLS

During the August recess many members of Congress host Town Hall Meetings in their district. Open to the public, these meetings are a chance for members to hear directly from their constituents about the key issues before Congress. This August, the humanitarian crisis at the southern border and unaccompanied immigrant children are likely to be a frequently discussed topic, as is immigration reform. Anti-immigrant groups will be present to make their case and we need to make sure that our elected officials hear LOUD and CLEAR that we, as Episcopalians, want to see a response to these children driven by compassion, and an immigration system that is just and humane. By asking questions about the treatment of children, or the reunification of families, we communicate with our elected officials about the values we share as a community, and the role we have to play as people of faith. The August recess is so important precisely because of these moments where the electorate has the chance to change a representative's or senator's mind on an issue.

Follow these easy steps to get involved:

1. Call your Representative to ask when and where their Town Halls will be held.
2. Invite other community members who care about unaccompanied children and or/ immigration reform to attend with you. Make signs, wear t-shirts, and find creative ways to visually display that you are a person of faith who supports immigration reform.
3. Get there early and sit near microphones. Don't all sit together – it will help show that there is not just one group that supports compassionate immigration policies, but many from all over the community.
4. Prepare your question(s) ahead of time and write them down, in case they only take written questions. Have one or two key facts at your fingertips and include them when you ask your questions, along with a story about why you care or of someone who is impacted in your community. It can be tempting to want to cover every aspect of immigration reform or try and rebut other questions that have been raised, but keep the message clear, concise, and consistent. You can always follow-up with the office after the Town Hall.



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5. Raise your hand to ask a question and keep your hand up until they give you time to speak. Remain polite but speak loudly and do not allow others to interrupt you if your question is taken. Find a way to be heard by cheering for others' questions, making a lot of noise in order for them to give you time to speak, and talking with the representative or their staff afterwards, and reemphasizing your point.

If you would like additional background materials, information on your representative's stance, or assistance formulating questions, please contact kconway@episcopalchurch.org.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Why are people fleeing now?

Voices in Congress and the media have attempted to discredit the idea that violence in Central America is the key factor pushing millions of Central Americans from their homes. While it is true that Central America has a history of continued violence, falsely conflating U.S. immigration policies with the current humanitarian crisis in Central America portrays a fundamental misunderstanding about how displacement happens and evolves.

VIOLENCE

1. Community leaders in both Honduras and El Salvador report gangs have grown more aggressive in recent months, instituting “join or die” policies <http://tpr.org/post/streets-honduras-look-what-driving-thousands-children-us> in some neighborhoods.
2. While 2011 was reported to be the peak year for the homicide rate in Honduras (a country that continues to hold the dubious distinction of having the highest murder rate in the world for four straight years), the rate of forced disappearances increased in 2013 (reported disappearances of women and girls increased by 281% in 2013 when compared to data from 2008: <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/12582>), leading analysts to conclude that the homicide rate may not have actually gone down but rather that victims’ bodies are being disposed of more discretely or that government data was being manipulated.
3. In El Salvador there was a 93% increase in disappearances <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/el-salvador-travel-warning.html> in 2013 according to the U.S. State Department.
4. In Honduras the youth murder rate has surged over the first 5 months of 2014, rising from an average of 70 children and youth killed per a month in 2010-2013 to an average of 90 children <http://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/policiales/647527-96/reportan-muerte-violenta-de-270-hondure%C3%B1os-menores-de-23-a%C3%B1os> and youth



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killed per a month in 2014. May 2014 saw the heaviest death toll for children and youth with 102 murdered that month <http://hoy.com.do/mas-de-100-menores-de-23-anos-fueron-asesinados-en-honduras-en-mayo/>.

5. In Honduras from 2005 to 2012, murders of women and girls increased 346%. Murders of men and boys increased by 292% over the same time period.⁴ http://www.observatoriodeseguridadciudadanadelasmujeres.org/materiales/INFORME_VCM_C.A..pdf
6. “Although Salvadoran police statistics show a decrease in annual homicides during 2012 and 2013, the homicide rate has been rising steadily since August 2013,” according to the U.S. State Department. <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings/el-salvador-travel-warning.html>
7. 130,000 people were displaced one or more times in El Salvador in 2012 alone in a country of roughly 6 million people <http://rsq.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2014/06/10/rsq.hdu008.full.pdf+html>

IMPUNITY

1. Impunity also appears to be on the rise in the region. During the past three years, 48,947 people were murdered in the Northern Triangle, the most violent region of the world. Countries achieved convictions in 2,295 of those homicide cases, representing a regional impunity rate of 95 percent for homicides during that three-year period. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/the-northern-triangle-the-countries-that-dont-cry-for-their-dead>
2. Only 20 of every 100 murders are ever investigated in Honduras according to official data of the Honduran Public Ministry. <https://news.vice.com/article/honduras-is-combating-its-homicide-epidemic-with-militarization>

4 It bears mentioning that the murder rate, according to uncorroborated government statistics, dropped in 2013, so a recent analysis found the murder rate for women and girls rose 263% between 2005 and 2013. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48241#.U9bCFvldXnJ> However, this perceived drop in the murder rate may be (bump up to previous page) attributable to the dramatic 281% increase <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/12582> in forced disappearances of women and girls over the last five years in Honduras.



COMPLICITY AND CORRUPTION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT

1. In September 2013, a new law gave the military full policing powers in Honduras, despite objections from the nation's Human Rights Ombudsman who called the move clearly unconstitutional <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/09/military-given-full-powers-to-fight-crime-in-honduras/>. Women's groups in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, where the police were illegally militarized a year before, have reported soaring levels of sexual assault and violence against women after the military police take over. <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/12582>
2. Since July 2011 the government of Honduras has refused to share its homicide <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/the-northern-triangle-the-countries-that-dont-cry-for-their-dead> data with the independent analysts at the Violence Observatory at the National Autonomous University of Honduras or any other independent group, leading to allegations that the government may be manipulating crime data.
3. In Honduras the police are deeply penetrated by organized crime. A Feb. 2014 report by the leading newspaper "El Herald" found that over 200 national police were implicated in killings for hire, drug theft, and corruption. <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/the-northern-triangle-the-countries-that-dont-cry-for-their-dead>
4. In Honduras, there are substantiated reports <http://www.elheraldo.hn/csp/mediapool/sites/ElHeraldo/Sucesos/story.csp?cid=621908&sid=293&fid=219> of police forming and participating in death squads and committing extra-judicial executions in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa.



WHY ARE PEOPLE FLEEING NOW?

- Although 2011 may have been the peak year for reported homicides in Honduras, the number of disappearances has risen significantly, suggesting that the homicide rate may not have actually gone down but rather that some victims' bodies are being hidden rather than displayed. El Salvador has similarly seen a rise in disappearances.
- While murder rates for adults have decreased slightly in the region, murder rates for children and youth have risen significantly. In Honduras the youth murder rate has surged over the first 5 months of 2014, rising from an average of 70 children and youth killed per a month in 2010-2013 to an average of 90 per month in 2014.
- There are no effective witness protection systems in these countries. Those who witness or are victims of a crime are often left no choice but to relocate or risk being targeted long before the case gets to trial, if it is even investigated at all.
- In Honduras, there are substantiated reports of police forming and participating in death squads and committing extra-judicial executions in San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa; a recent investigation found that over 200 national police in Honduras were implicated in killings for hire, drug theft, and corruption.
- Impunity is widespread in the region. The conviction rate for murders in all three countries hovers at about 5%.

What are the push factors? What about pull factors in the United States?

- Even if violence was not continuing to worsen, a lag between the spike in violence and the largest numbers of children, families, and asylum-seekers fleeing is a typical pattern for displacement in conflict zones.
- People often try to relocate in-country when they're first threatened. But eventually people discover that no matter how many times they move within the country—to a new neighborhood or a new city—they aren't safe, and so many of them flee outside the region. This is very similar to patterns of internal and then external displacement that we see in other conflict zones around the world.



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- Similarly, people may not flee at the first horrific act of violence in their neighborhood, but after they've seen a classmate and a family member and a neighbor all murdered, and have seen the police fail to investigate all three—or worse, recognized the police as being in active collusion with the perpetrators—they come to understand that their government has been compromised and that it cannot or will not protect them.
- UNHCR reports that other stable countries in the region, such as Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize have reported that asylum requests from Honduran, Guatemalan, and Salvadorian nationals have risen 712% since 2008. These countries do not have the TVPRA of 2008 or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or other policies that some in the U.S. have incorrectly identified as “magnets” for Central American migration.
- If this migration were based solely on “pull factors,” more Nicaraguan children, living in the poorest country in the region, would be fleeing to the United States in numbers similar to Honduran, Salvadorian, and Guatemalan children. Instead, over 75% of children fleeing to the United States are fleeing Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

How should the U.S. respond?

- This is an emergency situation that requires an emergency response. A clean supplemental is the appropriate means to address the emergency funding.
- Protections for children are in place because providing safety for children is a recognized national priority and humanitarian imperative. We cannot turn our backs on vulnerable children and our American ideals simply because a large number of children need protection.
- Extremely vulnerable children must receive child appropriate services and care when they arrive at our borders seeking refuge, but that care should not come at the expense of other vulnerable populations of concern to whom the United States has pledged protection and support.
- Cuts to refugee services hurt refugees already here and the communities that welcome them, impeding their ability to obtain education, employment, and stability. Cuts to refugee funding hurt refugees abroad living in camps or other displacement situations



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who have already been approved for resettlement, passed security and medical checks, and are waiting to depart to begin their lives anew in the United States.

- We cannot enforce our way out of this crisis, and rolling back protections for vulnerable people will do nothing to address the violence that compels them to flee
- Due process is imperative and those eligible for refugee protections, or a related status, must be afforded their chance to have their case heard through an individualized assessment.
- We should not respond to this crisis by increasing the detention of children and families seeking protection or decreasing due process protections for migrants. Denying refugee and trafficked children fair and meaningful access to protection is in direct contradiction to our responsibility and global leadership for protecting the most vulnerable.
- The world is watching our response to this crisis. How can we ask partners in Turkey, Jordan, and elsewhere to continue to accept increasing numbers of vulnerable people while we restrict access to protection at ours? Other stable nations in Central America are receiving increasing numbers of vulnerable adults and children from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, and will follow our example.



SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGRESS

Dear Senator/ Representative _____,

As an Episcopalian and your constituent, I urge you to reject changes to the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008 and other policies that would remove lifesaving protections and services from vulnerable unaccompanied children.

An immediate response to this crisis is needed, but removing key protections from bipartisan legislation, especially at a time when more children are in need of these life-saving protections, is the wrong response. Legislative proposals such as the HUMANE Act (Helping Unaccompanied Minors and Alleviating National Emergency) do not offer appropriate humanitarian solutions to this crisis and do not address the systemic violence and instability that continues to force children to flee for their lives.

When Congress resumes in September, I urge you to support legislation that will:

1. Ensure that the well-being of vulnerable children is the driving force behind our policy response. Children should not be treated as an enforcement priority but should have access to child welfare personnel, legal counsel, and the services they need to navigate the immigration system. The TVPRA and other laws governing the protection and care for these children should not be changed and increases to family detention should be opposed.
2. Provide vital funding for refugee services in FY14 and FY15. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within Health and Human Services is the office that provides lifesaving support services to resettled refugees, asylees, Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa recipients, Cuban and Haitian entrants, and survivors of human trafficking and torture. ORR is also responsible for providing care for unaccompanied immigrant children, and earlier this summer \$94 million was reprogrammed away from



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- services to refugees in order to care for rising numbers of unaccompanied children. ORR needs at least \$1.2 billion in additional funding in 2014 to care for vulnerable children and replenish reprogrammed funds. The U.S. must show leadership by protecting unaccompanied children while maintaining our commitment to refugee resettlement and serving all of the populations within ORR's mandate equally by providing additional funding in FY14 and robust funding in FY15.
3. Avoid conflating the need for emergency funding with sweeping policy decisions. The violence in Central America that has displaced millions and forced tens of thousands of children to flee is an emergency situation that requires an emergency response. Restricting access to protection for asylum seekers and reducing due process for children, however, signify a significant and weighty change in U.S. humanitarian policy and law. Changes of this magnitude must be considered carefully and deliberately, without being tied to vital funding.

The United States is capable of meeting this challenge with compassion and Episcopalians stand ready to work with Congress and the Administration in the implementation of humanitarian solutions to this crisis.

Thank you for your public service.

Regards,



INTERFAITH LETTER *to* CONGRESS
and the ADMINISTRATION
RE: UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

African American Ministers In Action • Alliance of Baptists • The American Friends Service Committee • The Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America • Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) • Church World Service • Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach • Conference of Major Superiors of Men • The Episcopal Church • Evangelical Lutheran Church in America • Franciscan Action Network • Friends Committee on National Legislation • Florida Immigrant Coalition, Inc. (FLIC) • Ignatian Solidarity Network • Jesuit Conference of the United States • The Kino Border Initiative • Latin America Working Group • Leadership Conference of Women Religious • The Leadership Team of the Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise • Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service • Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns • Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office • Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate JPIC office • National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd • National Council of Churches, USA • National Council of Jewish Women • NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby • The Presbyterian Peace Fellowship • Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) • Sisters of Mercy of the Americas • United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries • The United Church of Christ

JULY 14, 2014

Dear Mr. President and Members of Congress,

Our faith traditions challenge us to welcome the immigrant through scriptures such as Leviticus 19:34, “*The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born.*” Many of our organizations are living out this command by working tirelessly in bus stations and shelters to assist vulnerable children and families coming from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador and in ministries dedicated to human rights and sustainable development in the Northern Triangle.¹

While we appreciate the U.S. government’s attention to the humanitarian crisis faced by migrants from Central America, we strongly object to proposals to detain families with children and to any move to roll back the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) in order to effect expeditious deportations. Forcibly and hurriedly returning people in need of internation-

1 El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras



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al protection back to the dangerous situations they fled without adequate due process would undermine our obligations under international law and our position as a global humanitarian leader and would be a moral disgrace.

As we read through the Administration's supplemental appropriations request, we are pleased to see an increase in funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), as increased funding is needed so that ORR can adequately serve both unaccompanied children and refugees. However, we urge Congress to provide more funds in the supplemental to increase legal services for unaccompanied children in the United States and enhance programs to reduce violence in sending countries so that individuals, particularly children and families, are not forced to undertake dangerous journeys in the first place. We are also deeply concerned about language in the supplemental request that would discourage persecuted individuals in Central America from seeking asylum and protection, and that would expand the detention of children and families without addressing the unacceptable conditions of these facilities. Additionally, we oppose any proposals that would restrict these children's access to life-saving protection or return them to unsafe situations in which they could be further exploited.

This is a regional humanitarian crisis, not a U.S. immigration enforcement problem. Since 2009 asylum requests by Hondurans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans seeking refuge in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize have increased sharply. In fact, compared to 2008, UNHCR registered a 712% increase in the number of asylum applications in the region in 2013.² Many of the Central Americans arriving in the United States today are people primarily fleeing violence. The current crisis thus demands both a humanitarian response in the short-term and, in the long-term, policies to address complex root causes. The message to parents not to let their children make this dangerous journey fails to account for the truly desperate situations facing many children and families. No parent sends their child into danger unless they feel

2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Children on the Run" unhcrwashington.org/children, July 2, 2014



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they have no choice. The U.S. State Department currently has travel advisories in effect for Honduras and El Salvador, warning that the level of crime and violence remains critically high and noting that, “criminals operate with a high degree of impunity throughout Honduras.”³ Our country regularly pleads with governments of countries in other parts of the world to keep their borders, hospitals, and schools accessible for refugees fleeing violence and persecution.⁴ Thus far this fiscal year, unaccompanied children represent less than 0.02 percent of our population (by comparison, refugees from Syria now make up 20 percent of the population in Lebanon). When the U.S. is faced with a mixed migration flow that includes many refugees and others in need of humanitarian relief, we must not renege on our moral and legal obligations to protect those fleeing for their lives.

We respectfully ask that you consider the steps below to address the needs of Central Americans fleeing harm in a just, effective, compassionate, and comprehensive manner:

Strengthen the humanitarian response in the United States. The U.S. must embrace its moral and legal obligations to asylum-seekers, many of which are women and children, who have arrived at our borders seeking protection. A policy of “sealing” borders and housing vulnerable people in jail-like conditions will not dissuade people who are fleeing for their lives and seeking safety. These policies instead risk driving desperate people into even more dangerous circumstances and inflicting more pain upon those already suffering.

PROCESS WOMEN, CHILDREN AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS HUMANELY

- *Strengthen community-based alternatives to detention programs, which are cost effective and humane.* We are thankful for the current partnership between FEMA/ORR and faith-based agencies in responding to

3 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Travel Warnings, July 2014. travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html

4 Anne C. Richard, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State. Statement to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, January 2014. www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/remarks/2014/219388.htm.



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this humanitarian crisis. We suggest redirecting resources slated for family detention to aid and assist this collaboration. Rather than the 6,000 detention beds called for in the Administration's Supplemental Request, we urge Congress to provide funds to alternatives to detention. We further reject the use of electronic shackles for children.

- *Seek alternatives to a failed policy of family detention.* Unnecessary detention often bars bona fide refugees and others from accessing the few pro bono legal services that are available. The T. Don Hutto detention facility for families was a national embarrassment. Thankfully, the Administration closed this facility in 2009, ending its legacy of inhumane treatment of women and children.⁵ There is no guarantee that this renewed effort to incarcerate families will not have the same outcome. While we do not support family detention, we believe that where it exists, you have an obligation to allow community organizations access to facilities to monitor the conditions inside, and to allow religious services and visitation.
- *Leave intact the provisions of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 relating to unaccompanied children.* Our organizations are deeply troubled by the implication that the Administration and some members of Congress are considering removing children more quickly and less safely than is required by current law. We have long been concerned about the adequacy of screenings for children from contiguous countries in ensuring that they will not face trafficking, persecution or harm if returned quickly, including children from Mexico who are often summarily returned to harm. Traumatized children, some as young as four years old, often will not divulge complex details of threats and violence during a first meeting with strangers, and are even less likely to do so in the presence of armed strangers in uniform. The U.S. should be working to ensure the best interests and safety of chil-

5 *Landmark Settlement Announced in Federal Lawsuit Challenging Conditions at Immigrant Detention Center in Texas*, ACLU, August 2007. www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights-prisoners-rights/landmark-settlement-announced-federal-lawsuit-challenging.



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dren is paramount rather than curtailing existing protections. No child, including children from Mexico, should be deported without adequate screenings for trafficking and protection needs to ensure they can be returned safely and not placed back into the hands of traffickers and others who will exploit them. Proposals that would roll back protections for children from Central America or treat them as Mexican children are treated currently, should be rejected. Independent child welfare, legal and anti-trafficking experts should have access to unaccompanied children to assist in the identification, screening, and referrals of potential child asylum applicants, trafficking victims and potential child-trafficking victims. For the short time children are in CBP custody, they should receive adequate nutrition, housing, and medical treatment.

- *Provide counsel to all unaccompanied children.* In addition to the legal protections provided to children in current law, each child should be provided with legal counsel and guaranteed that his/her case will be evaluated in-person by an immigration judge with sufficient time for a determination of the best interest of the child and his/her eligibility for relief under current U.S. law. While the Administration's request includes some funds for legal orientation programs and an increased number of immigration judges, it does not go far enough. We urge Congress to provide additional funds to ensure these children have access to legal assistance and a chance to have their stories heard in a timely manner.
- *Improve oversight of the asylum screening process* to ensure that all individuals are asked if they fear return to their country of origin and are referred to the asylum process if needed. In particular, unaccompanied children from Mexico are entitled to less due process in asylum screening than adults or other unaccompanied children. They, too, should be screened for asylum protections by a child welfare and asylum expert.



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- *Provide unaccompanied children with adequate services, while maintaining services for other groups under the care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement.* The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the agency responsible for the care of unaccompanied immigrant children, has addressed the budget shortfall resulting from the child migrant emergency by reprogramming money destined for services for resettled refugees. Supplemental funding is needed to adequately address the unexpected child migration crisis while maintaining commitments to rescuing and resettling refugees in distress abroad. In addition to supplemental funds urgently needed this year, ORR will require additional funding in the coming year to respond to this crisis without sacrificing other refugee services. We support the Administration's supplemental request for ORR in Fiscal Year 2014, and urge Congress to provide these important funds.

The U.S. response to the current crisis must also address root causes. Too often we settle for quick and at times harmful "fixes," treating the proverbial symptoms rather than the underlying causes. There are several steps U.S. policymakers can take to improve conditions for would-be migrants in Central America, making it possible for people to find safety and prosperity in their home communities. However, these efforts must be adequately resourced; we were disappointed to see that only 8% of the Administration's supplemental request is directed toward addressing root causes.

ADDRESS POVERTY AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITY IN CENTRAL AMERICA

- *Increase investments in sustainable development,* such as education, job training, job creation, cooperative businesses, small-scale agriculture, and environmental care, such as planting trees and community gardens.
- *Adjust trade agreements* (both enacted and proposed) to better ensure respect for human and labor rights as well as environmental standards. Modify or revoke agreements that negatively impact livelihoods and rural economies and lead to increased poverty and migration.⁶

6 *Illegal Immigration and NAFTA*, Dustin Ensinger, February 2011. economyincrisis.org/content/illegal-immigration-and-nafta.



ADDRESS VIOLENCE AND CHILD AND CRIME VICTIM PROTECTION SYSTEMS

- *Increase investment in community-based youth violence prevention programs.* Programs such as Cure Violence⁷ and the Paso y Paso social education program in Honduras, the Puente Belice Program in Guatemala, and Youth Builders⁸ in El Salvador can effectively address the culture of violence in cities struggling with some of the highest levels of violence in the world.⁹ Investment should include nonviolent conflict intervention programs and employ restorative justice models. For instance, taking a public health approach to violence is helpful for reducing rather than merely displacing violence.
- *Reduce reliance on militarized and armed approaches to the prevention of violence.* A militarized approach to gangs, border security, and drug policy often contributes to violence and distrust in communities and leads to egregious human rights violations. Instead, the U.S. should focus on 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.
- *Provide resources and technical assistance for shelters, particularly for girls and women fleeing violence, and for effective witness protection programs.* These investments will allow witnesses and crime victims to participate in justice processes while staying in their countries of origin and can help reduce impunity over time.
- *Support well-trained, well-resourced and accountable child protection systems in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.* The three countries currently have inadequate or not-yet-functioning (in the case of

7 Cure the Violence. www.cureviolence.org. They focus on directly reducing shootings and homicides.

8 *El Salvador*, Catholic Relief Services. crs.org/countries/el-salvador.

9 Evaluations show declines in homicides and gang crimes in Los Angeles over four years. Santa Tecla, El Salvador, where a program started in 2003, now has a 40% lower homicide rate compared with surrounding communities.



JUSTICE *and* ADVOCACY MINISTRIES

Honduras) child welfare systems. It is critical to have accountable and adequately staffed and resourced child protection systems to protect children at risk of violence and abuse and *these agencies must be in place and prepared to receive returned children before any child is removed*. For those children deemed ineligible for humanitarian relief and only after child welfare systems are adequate to the task of receiving such individuals, the U.S. should invest in strengthening return and reintegration programs for deported children. Such programs should be implemented in all cases in which a child is being returned to his/her home country to ensure that the placement is safe, permanent and in the child's best interests. Follow-up social services and monitoring should be provided in countries of origin by civil society social service providers when an unaccompanied child is repatriated, with outcomes that are tracked. This approach should both facilitate safe and healthy reintegration, and strengthen accountability for the welfare of deported children.

As faith based organizations, we are called to “love the stranger” and “welcome the stranger”. We urgently appeal to all people of faith, to our leaders in Congress, and to you, President Obama, to respond to this humanitarian crisis with mercy, compassion, love and hospitality.

Sincerely,

CC: Jeh Johnson, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
John Kerry, Secretary, U.S. Department of State



JUSTICE *and* ADVOCACY MINISTRIES

REFUGEE COUNCIL USA LETTER *to* CONGRESS
RE: REFUGEE FUNDING *and*
UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

<http://www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/RCUSA%20supplemental%20letter%20FINAL.pdf>