

Board of Justice
Michigan Area United Methodist Church

Faith in Action Alert

You must not wrong or oppress an alien; you were yourself aliens in Egypt. You must not wrong a widow or a fatherless child. ~ Exodus 22:21-22

We oppose immigration policies that separate family members from each other or that include detention of families with children... ~ United Methodist Social Principles, paragraph 162.H

I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ~ Matthew 25:31-46

And earthly powers doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice. ~ William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

Our hearts break at the photos and news stories of children and their parents pulled apart and separated at our southwestern borders. According to the *New York Times* (*A 5-Year-Old-Migrant's Heartache: When Will I See My Papa?*, Miriam Jordan, 6/8/18), anyone crossing the border illegally will now be criminally prosecuted. This directive has led to "the breakup of hundreds of migrant families... In just the first two weeks... 638 parents who arrived with 658 children had been prosecuted." This one little boy is in foster care, somewhere in Michigan. His father is in jail in Texas. And our hearts break.

The current administration sees this zero-tolerance policy as a "tough deterrent" against illegal immigration, noting that "we do not have a policy to separate children from their parents. Our policy is, if you break the law we will prosecute you." (Kristjen Nielsen, homeland security secretary, as quoted in the *NYTimes*, 6/8/18)

And so, in the ongoing debate over immigration reform, children have become the acceptable collateral damage. The United States Government has created heartbreak and trauma for parents and children who have come here seeking safety and a better life. Adults are arrested and criminally prosecuted for improper entry while their children are taken away and deemed "unaccompanied." It can take weeks before a parent knows the whereabouts of their child. And our hearts break.

The separation of children from their parents, especially those seeking asylum, is abhorrent. To see children in cages similar to a dog kennel, sleeping on concrete floors, flouts all human decency. And our hearts break.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has condemned immigrant family separation and family detention as "harsh and counterproductive" (*NYTimes* 6/8/18). The American Medical Association has found it causes "unnecessary distress, depression, and anxiety" (*NYTimes* 6/8/18). The United Nations has declared the "practice of separating children from migrant families entering the United States violates their [children's] rights and international law" (Cumming-Bruce, *NYTimes*, 6/5/18). Our own Social Principles remind us that we have a special responsibility, **individually and collectively**, to protect children (UM Social Principles 162.C).

While many in this country hold a variety of opinions regarding immigration, a policy that seeks to use, exploit, and terrorize children as a means to discourage their families from coming to our borders to claim asylum is clearly against Christian belief and practice.

As your new Michigan Area Board of Justice (created from the Detroit Board of Advocacy, Justice and Equity and the West Michigan Board of Church and Society) we cannot be silent to this injustice. We must speak out on behalf of our neighbors, on behalf of these children and their parents. We call on the

members of the Michigan Area of the United Methodist Church to action: to pray, to educate ourselves and our congregations, to give of our time and talents, to speak out and be advocates for justice and spread the word.

Action Steps

- **Pray:** Pray for the children and parents who will suffer due to this policy. Pray for the swift reuniting of these children with their parents. Pray that justice may be seasoned with mercy, that immigration reform be aligned with humanitarian values. Lift up those who work along our southwestern border, that they may have compassionate hearts. Pray for those who work at the shelters and those providing foster care. Pray for the physical and mental health of these separated children and their families. Pray for our leaders, the President, the Justice Department, the Office of Homeland Security, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the Department of Human Services and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, that their actions preserve the human and civil rights of all immigrants.
- **Educate yourself and your church:** Learn about Global Migration:
 - a. Go to the General Board of Global Ministries migration page: www.umcjustice.org/what-we-care-about/civil-and-human-rights/global-migration. Study the statements found in our 2016 UM Book of Discipline, our Social Principles, and our 2016 Book of Resolutions on Immigration, Families, Social Justice and Human Rights.
 - b. Read and distribute the statements by the Council of Bishops and the United Methodist Women (UMW) on Immigrant Family Separation.
- **Contribute:** Make a financial contribution to Justice for our Neighbors (JFON-MI). Support their efforts to provide legal services to these separated families. Support the Sanctuary congregations in your community.
- **Act. Write. Speak Up:** Write to the President. Urge this administration to stop their policy of family separation. Let Senator Debbie Stabenow and Senator Gary Peters and your Congressperson know where you and our church stand on this issue. Tell them to stop funding the forcible separation of families. Call for increased oversight of existing enforcement and push for an end to this new "zero-tolerance" policy. Call for the expedited reunions of all these separated families. Petition the Justice Department to do right by the immigrant children on our borders. Write letters to the editor in your local paper. Speak up for those seeking asylum.
- **Tell your own personal immigrant stories:** Invite a speaker from JFON to speak at your church. Join with Families Belong Together, <http://familiesbelong.org>, in events such as the upcoming rally on Thursday, June 14th in Detroit, Ann Arbor, and Traverse City.
- **And finally, Share:** Share and discuss this information with friends, your congregation and your inter-faith family.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak out and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and the needy. ~ Proverbs 31:8-9

The Rev. George Covintree, Chairperson: Board of Justice (as of July 1, 2018)
Co-Chairperson Board of Justice, Advocacy and Justice

The Rev. Ameer Paparella, Co-Chairperson, Board of Church and Society