

Defending the Sanctuary of The Family

A Faith Letter in Support of Asylum-Seekers Held at Federal Detention Center in SeaTac

“Any human being is a sanctuary. Every human being is the dwelling of God...

Any person, by being a son or daughter of humanity, is a living sanctuary who nobody has the right to invade.” - Elie Wiesel

“You shall not oppress strangers. You know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” - Exodus 23:9

As religious leaders, people of faith and proud residents of the State of Washington, we decry the cruel, dehumanizing and morally bankrupt policy of separating asylum-seeking women and men from their children upon arrival to the United States. Our souls cry out at the heart-breaking stories of the 206 people, including 174 women and 32 men, incarcerated at the Federal Detention Center in SeaTac, many of whom do not know where their children are currently located, let alone when they may be reunited as families. For these migrants who are mainly from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Cuba, among other nations, their tragic experience adds to the trauma that led them to seek refuge in the United States. We pray for their well-being, demand their immediate release and call for an end to policies which seek to criminalize people who ask for the most basic of human rights: The right to live in peace with their families safe from the threats of persecution and the violence of poverty. Their pleas for asylum need to be fully heard, honored and acted upon.

The Trump Administration’s policies of “zero-tolerance” and “deterrence” applied to people who try to leave the violence that they have experienced first-hand are a dangerous misuse of authority that tears at the social fabric of our society and diminishes the verity of our nation, one that proclaims the notion of “liberty and justice for all.”

The Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice are engaging in systemic xenophobia with policies and practices that lead to:

- detaining families;
- prosecuting unaccompanied minors, many without legal representation;
- delaying credible fear interviews for close to a month;
- dramatically curtailing the possibility of asylum for people fleeing gang or domestic violence; and,
- separating parents from their children after being charged, prosecuted and jailed, without opportunities to know their whereabouts or communicate with their children.

These women, men and children came to a country that for generations of immigrants has provided hope and an opportunity to contribute socially, politically, and economically to the diverse tapestry that is the United States of America. Instead, what these migrants have found is ongoing suffering, multiple forms of oppression and the reprehensible use of cages to hold them as if they were animals.

We denounce these policies and practices and demand an end to them in the interest of recognizing the fundamental dignity of migrating people as children of God and humankind. We announce once more that God’s love knows no boundaries and has no exclusions. The asylum seekers detained at SeaTac and

throughout the United States are God's beloved who deserve our love and respect by virtue of their very humanity. As bearers of spiritual traditions founded upon compassion, mercy and justice, we will not rest in the Northwest until the detained asylum seekers are released, granted their credible fear interviews, and reunited with their children as they seek asylum.

We call for:

1. access to legal representation, credible fear interviews and a reasonable time-frame for people who choose to pursue asylum to do so, without the prospect of indefinite detention and expedited deportation;
2. immediate release of the asylum seekers who are incarcerated in Washington State and across the country; and
3. prompt reunification of parents and children who have been separated.

The policy of separating family members who come together to the United States to apply for asylum is an extreme, disruptive and self-defeating strategy that is already leading to the loss of life, permanent trauma to families, and the evisceration of our national responsibility to be a place of humanitarian welcome.

We pledge to provide material, emotional, advocacy and spiritual support for these women and men. We lift up their prayers, hopes and dreams with our own and form a united chorus that sings for their lives and exclaims, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24).

From the streets and our places of worship, we lift up prayers of protection for you, the 206 detained at SeaTac. *No están solos*. You are not alone. We stand with you and your families. In solidarity with you, we will use the power within us and among us, so that you may continue on your long walk to freedom.

Sign onto this letter at: <http://bit.ly/FaithLetterAsylumSeekers>

Or email: info@thechurchcouncil.org

Deadline for signatures before publication is **5 p.m. on Tuesday, June 19.**