



PAX CHRISTI MICHIGAN STATEMENT ON IMMIGRATION

From the moment Donald Trump announced his entry into the 2016 presidential race in June 2015, he has revealed deep-seated religious discrimination and blatant racism. After he became president, two attempts to ban Muslims from the U.S. were invalidated by lower courts. Nevertheless, a third version of the ban, applicable to 5 majority-Muslim nations, was upheld by the Supreme Court in June 2018. In January 2020, the administration extended the ban to additional nations. In response, Democrats in the House of Representatives are considering a “NO BAN Act” that would repeal the travel ban and limit the president from imposing future restrictions based upon religion.

As he announced his candidacy, Trump stated “*When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best ... They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.*” Thus began a campaign of cruelty against Mexican and Central American migrants.

For decades, asylum seekers have arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border for reasons like economic scarcity, war, gang violence, and persecution. More recently, turmoil has become particularly acute in the “Northern Triangle” nations, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

The president responded by threatening to build a wall along the Mexican border, and in February 2019 announced he would utilize funds appropriated for other purposes to construct the wall. In April 2018, a “zero-tolerance” policy was adopted to deter illegal immigration. Under the policy, thousands of children were separated from their families, with the adults prosecuted and held in federal jails. In fact, family separation began well before the policy was announced, but no provision had been made to reunite separated families. The policy officially ended in June 2018. However, a House committee reported that by October 2019, more than 1,000 *additional children* had been separated from their families.

Other measures, aimed at drastically reducing immigration, have been initiated or significantly increased, including: an attempt to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) that provides legal protection for young people who come to the U.S. as children – the issue is now awaiting a Supreme Court decision; “Metering,” that is, severely limiting the number of people who can request asylum at a port of entry each day; “Migrant Protection Protocols,” requiring asylum seekers to return to Mexico to await the often long delayed start of the asylum process; a July 2019 “Asylum Transit Ban,” eliminating asylum for those entering at the U.S.-Mexico border who “transit” through another country after leaving their home; the July 2019 intensification in enforcement of “Expedited Removal,” by which low-level immigration officers deny entry and/or physically remove asylum seekers without the normal removal process involving hearings before an immigration judge; an increase in prosecutions, including targeting people like Scott Warren of the immigrant advocacy group No Mas Muertes (No More Deaths), who was acquitted in November 2019 for providing humanitarian aid to migrants; and, new “wealth test” rules – affirmed by the Supreme Court in January 2020 - making it easier to deny immigrants residency or admission to the U.S. because they have used, or might use, public-assistance programs.

These measures have had a devastating impact. As Pax Christi USA Bishop President John Stowe has noted, "There has been one chapter after another of serious atrocities intentionally perpetrated on some of the most vulnerable people: family separation, loss of children in custody, two dozen deaths in ICE (Immigration & Customs Enforcement) custody since 2017, children in cages, living under bridges in extreme temperatures, shielded from public view, assaulted and brutalized, underfed and without facilities for bathing or hygiene. Now we have raids targeting families who have fled situations of danger from gang violence, drug trafficking, and economic desperation, and changing rules about who qualifies for asylum right as people are fleeing for their lives."

Pax Christi Michigan (PCM) deplores the cruelty, intolerance and racism readily apparent in the words, actions and immigration policies of President Trump and other members of his administration. As Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego has observed, "Our government has weaponized fear – the fear being sown within our nation that refugees ... have now become the enemy; and the even more reprehensible fear being unleashed on the hearts and souls of immigrant mothers and fathers that they will be separated from their children purely as an act of intimidation."

In the clearest possible language, Jesus instructs us to welcome immigrants, "I was a stranger and you invited me in." Today, when powerful forces in our nation urge anti-immigrant fear and deny help to the most vulnerable immigrants, it is our obligation to live our faith fearlessly. We must see support for aliens in our midst as an opportunity to model for fellow Americans, especially those who do not share our faith, the love and beauty at the core of the Gospels.

Echoing the Gospel challenge, Pope Francis has repeatedly urged that we "look to build bridges between people, bridges that allow us to break down the walls of exclusion and exploitation." Furthermore, "You cannot be a Christian without living like a Christian. You cannot be a Christian without practicing the Beatitudes. You cannot be a Christian without doing what Jesus teaches us in Matthew 25. It's hypocrisy to call yourself a Christian and chase away a refugee or someone seeking help, someone who is hungry or thirsty, toss out someone who is in need of my help. If I say I am Christian, but do these things, I'm a hypocrite ... All nations must focus on service to the poorest, the sick, those who have abandoned their homelands in search of a better future for themselves and their families. In putting ourselves at the service of the neediest, we will experience that we already are united; it is God's mercy that unites us."

Accordingly, PCM encourages our members and others to support the rights of asylum seekers, migrants and immigrants by urging Congress to: end family separation and the mistreatment of immigrant children; investigate and prevent additional deaths of immigrants in Customs and Border Patrol custody; provide adequate food, clothing, shelter and medical care for all immigrants as the legal process unfolds; provide access to attorneys for asylum seekers and assure that asylum claims be processed promptly and justly; and, by means of legislative action, reverse the unjust immigration policies and practices of the Trump administration.

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