

Churchwide Statement on the Abuse of Child Migrants

Proposed for consideration to the Kansas City 2019 Delegate Body on July 5, 2019

³³ When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. ³⁴ The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. Leviticus 19:33-34

Summary

As a historic peace church founded on the principle that Jesus' life, death and resurrection call Christians into reconciled, righteous, and right relationship, Mennonite Church USA finds the treatment of immigrant families and children at the border, as well as around the nation, a horrific violation of the Image of God and God-given human rights.

Background

We make this statement as part of our continuing effort as a denomination to work for justice for all people and in line with the previous resolution passed in Atlanta (2003) and revised after Phoenix (2014). Today migrants are detained at the border in both public and private facilities without adequate medical care. At least seven children have died in the custody of Customs and Border Patrol in the past year.¹ The United States government is currently in court to defend the claim that children should not receive basic toiletries and sanitary items. Children are separated from families without due diligence or regard for the pain of that separation.² Customs and Border Patrol is not trained to care for children and should not be responsible for the care of children, especially at the cost of separating children from the loving caregivers accompanying them.

As disciples of Jesus called to care for those in need, we believe the actions of the U.S. government are unconscionable, and we condemn these practices and commit, as peacemakers, to building better processes for migrants.

Jesus reminds us the greatest commandment is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind," and the second, which emerges from it, is "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." When asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus made clear the neighbor is anyone whose path crosses ours at a time when they are in need. Across the country, our congregations' paths are crossing with those of undocumented families in need.

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/why-are-migrant-children-dying-u-s-custody-n1010316>

² <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/AAP-Statement-on-Executive-Order-on-Family-Separation.aspx>

The current treatment of migrants at our border directly limits our Vision of Healing and Hope to “grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.” This government’s policies also obstruct the purpose of Mennonite Church USA to “nurture missional Mennonite congregations of many cultures.” Those crossing the border include members of our congregations and fellow members of the body of Christ. We are a diverse denomination with many immigrant stories, and the migration story unfolding at the border and around the United States is our story, too. Jesus himself was an undocumented refugee in Egypt as an infant fleeing the cruel hand of King Herod, and when he returned to his homeland, demonstrated hospitality to the immigrants and ethnic minorities he encountered.

What We Will Do:

During this week of Independence Day, we acknowledge that the United States detains many migrants in inadequate and unsanitary conditions. We stand against the traumatic separation of families, the deprivation of basic needs, and the detention of migrants. Therefore, the delegates of Mennonite Church USA assembly condemn the abuse of migrants and call for a change in policy and action by the United States government.

As a denomination we:

1. Recognize that no situation is so complex as to justify the building of internment camps and the abuse of children.
2. Stand alongside the undocumented members of our denomination, welcoming new attendees seeking God regardless of immigration status and honoring the gifts they bring and seeing the Image of God in them.
3. Advocate to the government for humane immigration policies at all levels, especially for children and other vulnerable people.
4. Affirm the 2003 resolution to “advocate for just and humane policies for immigrants and refugees by contacting local, state, and national elected officials.”
5. Seek connections with immigrant communities in our contexts and support those in sanctuary and the thousands of families whose loved ones have been deported.
6. Encourage congregations to send members to the border region through MCC Borderlands tours and similar organizations to learn and witness to the conditions of migrants.
7. Support the work of Mennonite Central Committee and other organizations, local congregations, and community actions to meet the basic needs of incoming migrants; advocate for family unification; and support humane and sensible immigration policy changes.