

## WHY CHRISTIANS CARE ABOUT IMMIGRANTS

By The Rev. David J. Gierlach, SCP  
Diocesan Social Justice Task Force

Why is there a concern within our Diocese about the Federal Administration's changes in policy on immigration and deportations with the promise of more to come? Is this something that should concerns us as Christians? And if so, why?

First, this crackdown is impacting many of our own Episcopal Church members. Many people in the Pacific Island community, including folks from Tonga and Samoa are here on Green Cards. Some of these people in their youth had interactions with the criminal justice system and have since completely turned their lives around. They are now incredible assets to the church and the wider community. Nevertheless, the Federal Administration's policy targets Green Card holders, especially those with any kind of criminal background, without regard to when the offences took place, and no matter how rehabilitated the person is now. Thus, faithful families are at risk of being split up or deported to lands they have never known.

Second, the recent deportation of hundreds of individuals to a notorious jail in El Salvador without even a modicum of due process should be concerning to every person in our country, migrant or citizen, church member or nonbeliever. If the Federal Administration prevails in convincing the court that it can deport people without any due process under the Alien Enemy Act, including denying such people an opportunity to prove that they are not subject to that Act, then every person is at risk of sudden and permanent removal from this nation. The scope of the Administration's power in this regard is still an open question.

Third, one of the most ancient commands of all of Scripture, running from the earliest writings through the prophets and throughout the New Testament, is the care and protection of the migrant, the stranger, and our neighbor. Jesus defines as anyone in need as our neighbor (see Luke 10:25-37).

The direction to care for the stranger and foreigner from the Hebrew Scripture is clear. Leviticus 19:33-34 set before the children of Israel the command: *"When a foreigner resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the foreigner. The foreigner who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you..."* Similarly in Exodus 22:21: *"Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt"*, and again in Exodus 23:9: *"You shall not oppress a foreigner, for you know the heart of a foreigner, seeing you were foreigners in the land of Egypt."*

Deuteronomy 10:18 reminds us that God *"...defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners..."* While the prophet Isaiah (58:6-7) makes care for the refugee explicit: *"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them..."?*

Jesus in fact begins his public ministry by quoting from Isaiah the famous passage about

bringing sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and good news for the poor. Jesus then goes on to confront the religious authorities who spend so much time worrying about the rules and regulations of the faith and so little time worrying about the weightier issues of justice, mercy and compassion (see Luke 6:20-49).

Indeed, the final judgment as described by Jesus in Matthew's gospel has nothing to do with our attendance at rituals, or even our failures and foibles. It has everything to do with *whether we cared for the least among us* (see Matthew 25:31-46).

As Episcopalians, we are guided by the promises of the Baptismal Covenant (see the Book of Common Prayer, page 305) to:

- Proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ.
- Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself
- Strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

As the Catechism notes, it is the ministry of the laity to "... represent Christ and his Church, to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the to carry on the Christ's work of reconciliation in the world" (see the Book of Common Prayer, page 855).

For more on the Episcopal Church's teaching on immigration and the current crisis see:

- [Letter from Episcopal Church leaders on Trump administration immigration executive orders](#)
- [Immigration Action Toolkit](#)
- [Summary of Episcopal Church Policy on Immigration and Refugee Issues](#)

For these theological, sociological, and simply human reasons, the Diocese of Hawai'i's efforts to push back against the efforts of the current Administration to villainize and deport immigrants without due process, is not only necessary, but also indeed required by our faith.

Finally, we must ever keep these word of Jesus Christ top of mind (Matthew 25:34-36):

*"Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."*