

January 13, 2026

Dear Association Community,

Greetings and peace to you all~

As a former resident of Minneapolis, where I lived during much of my tenure with Minnesota Conference staff, I've asked Rev. Howard to join me in preparing a pastoral letter regarding current events with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, commonly known as "ICE."

Why is this a moment for pastoral reflection? Why is this a time for resources?

For some, this moment feels shocking.
For others, it feels tragically familiar.

As people of faith in Northeast Ohio, we are reminded that violence connected to protest, public fear, and authority is not new in our nation's story. Our own region carries this memory deeply. The ground at Kent State still bears witness to what can happen when fear, force, and authority converge—and how quickly such moments can be absorbed, explained away, or forgotten.

We are sending this communication also because the Association staff are aware that ICE has been active in some Association communities, including the use of church properties for staging activities. If these events do not affect you or your congregation personally at this time, please receive these materials (designed specifically for UCC communities) in the spirit of preparedness and resourcing.

- **Minnesota Conference Minister**, [Rev. Dr. Tanya Sadagopan's Statement](#) cautions us against naming peace too quickly. The prophets warn of wounds treated carelessly, of reassurances offered before truth is faced and grief is honored. In moments like this, the church's first calling is not to resolve complexity or rush toward certainty, but to remain present—to lament, to listen, and to accompany those who are hurting.
- **Our UCC Offices in D.C.** [United Church of Christ](#) has joined with interfaith partners in prayerful public witness in Washington, D.C., and Minnesota—mourning loss of life, calling for moral accountability, and affirming the church's commitment to love, welcome, and human dignity. This shared witness reminds us that the church speaks in many voices, across many places, shaped by different callings.
- **Biblical & Worship Resources on Immigration:** The UCC has offered [this curated scripture references, prayers, and worship materials](#) to help congregations ground immigration justice work in biblical tradition and communal worship.
- **UCC National Ministries Event: [Faithful Response to Immigration Gathering \(March 17–19, 2026\)](#):** Co-hosted by Megan Bergert, our UCC Minister for Refugee and Migration, UCC and DOC faith leaders and congregations are invited to deepen

relationships, share practices, and strengthen a faithful, coordinated response to immigration challenges. Camp Christian, Marysville, OH.

Friends, once again our country is in the same storm but different boats. Some communities are deeply impacted; some aren't touched at all by ICE's operations. If your town or your church is not currently impacted, let us join together to take personally and prayerfully the presence of instability and violence in communities beyond our own.

What if healing begins not with forgetting, but with remembering truthfully? Not with certainty, but with humility? Perhaps the path forward is not creating distance, but creating nearness—to God and to one another.

May we have the courage to remain present at the crossroads of our own time, trusting that God meets us there, as God always has.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "E Larssen".

The Rev. Dr. Elena Larssen

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael Howard".

The Rev. Michael Howard