



CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) in the United States and Canada

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Rev. Teresa "Terri" Hord Owens, General Minister and President

February 11, 2025

Dear Disciples,

Today we are proud to join a multifaith coalition and the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (ICAP) in opposition to the rescission of the sensitive locations policy, which is a direct violation of the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). This decision directly interferes with our ability to fulfill our religious mandate and serve all of our congregants equally and with the dignity they deserve. We don't take this step lightly, but this extreme action from the federal government challenges a foundation of our faith and threatens to shatter our consecrated spaces. Our faith compels us to take a stand and protect our places of worship. As Disciples of Christ, we seek to protect the right of each congregation to worship and serve in their spaces as they wish to do. Our General Assembly invited all congregations in a 2017 resolution to become "immigrant-welcoming." We take seriously the command in Scripture to welcome the stranger (Leviticus 19:33-34 NRSV), and Jesus' teaching that whenever we minister to one of the least of these, we are ministering to him (Matthew 25:40 NRSV). Our General Board unanimously approved our joining this multifaith coalition in taking this action.

We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us. As part of this multifaith coalition, we seek to affirm that we do indeed welcome all. If you or anyone in your congregation has a question about this action, please feel free to contact: news@disciples.org.

Moving towards wholeness together,

Rev. Terri Hord Owens
General Minister and President

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Plaintiff testimonials:

"The extreme actions of our government call us to step up as we recognize that our practice of loving our neighbor outweighs our traditional stance of non-resistance. Today, we stand together as followers of Jesus, shaped by his life and teachings as revealed in scripture, honoring the cloud of witnesses that stood before us against state interference in the right of religious freedom during the Radical Reformation." - Rev. Iris de León Hartshorn, Mennonite Church USA

"The AME Zion Church is the church of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass and is known as 'The Freedom Church.' Our core mission includes worship and witness to the love and justice of GOD to all, especially the oppressed and marginalized regardless of their documentation. Unannounced raids into our sanctuaries and other church spaces presents very real danger to both our members and our communities, most of whom are black and brown people." - Bishop W. Darin Moore, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

"A core value of our Conference is 'racial hospitality, inclusion, and diversity.' We believe that raids conducted in churches violate the sanctity of our places of worship as sanctuaries of peace, spiritual refuge, and community support. Jesus declared in Matthew 21:13 that 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' and we call on authorities to respect these sacred spaces and seek justice through compassion rather than fear." - Rev. Freeman L. Palmer, Central Atlantic Conference United Church of Christ

"As Jewish leaders, we are mindful of our history as an immigrant people. For most of our history, we have moved from one land to another—because we were exiled or persecuted, or for a better future for our children. Jews in the United States came as immigrants and so we have always supported and welcomed immigrants. The most often repeated command in the Torah is to care for the stranger because we were strangers in the land of Egypt – in this way our scripture and history compels us to work with and help immigrants and 3 refugees." - Rabbi Hara Person, The Central Conference of American Rabbis

"Our church has long been committed to the inclusion of all persons in worship and our responsibility to minister to and serve all. We stand for the freedom of our congregations to worship and serve as they choose, and for those who are blessed by our ministries to be free from fear when they are in our spaces. We are deeply concerned about the impact of these actions on the safety of our congregations and their impact on our mission to be a movement for wholeness." - Rev. Teresa "Terri" Hord Owens, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

"We feel grave concern for those who are of migrant, immigrant, or refugee status within our congregations and in our communities who are threatened with deportation. The prospect that raids may bring that violent threat into our very church sanctuaries is already affecting the lives of many people in our denomination. God's love is our greatest command, and we believe this divine love is not delineated by political borders nor limited by national origin, ethnic identity, race, skin color, or other characteristics that often divide us. The Church of the Brethren is a Christian denomination committed to continuing the work of Jesus peacefully and simply, and is one of the three Historic Peace Churches." - David A. Steele, Executive Secretary, Church of the Brethren, Inc.

"We are a family of churches dedicated to serving vulnerable populations and ministering to our communities. We deeply value our nation's longstanding commitment to protecting the local church's constitutional right to carry out its biblical mission without government interference. The erosion of these protections leaves our congregations vulnerable to government intrusion, disrupting worship services, funerals, Bible studies, and other vital ministries that serve their communities." - Jesse Rincones, Convención Bautista Hispana de Texas
"In God's kingdom, immigrants and refugees are not at the edges, fearful and alone. We believe their struggles reveal the heart of God, and we cannot worship freely if some among us live in fear. By joining this lawsuit, we are

seeking the ability to gather to fully practice our faith and follow Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves." - Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe, The Episcopal Church

"Fellowship Southwest encourages and strengthens the compassionate mission and prophetic advocacy work of our churches and partners. We support an active network serving migrants every day because we take the words of Jesus seriously. Every church should be able to follow the divine mandate to love our neighbors and welcome the stranger without fear of ICE intrusions into sacred spaces or retribution from government officials who don't share our faith convictions." - Stephen Reeves, Fellowship Southwest

"Quakers associated with Friends General Conference have long affirmed the dignity and worth of all people. FGC deeply supports every Quaker meeting's right to live out and share the testimonies of our faith to all who enter the meetinghouse doors." - Barry Crossno, General Secretary, Friends General Conference

"This complaint is consistent with the hundreds of years of PCUSA understanding of connectional churches and the practice of religious freedoms inherent in our polity." - Rev. Jihyun Oh, Stated Clerk, General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

"The General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) stands firmly against the enforcement of the Sensitive Locations Policy, which creates fear, restricts access to essential services, and disproportionately harms immigrant communities. As an agency dedicated to racial justice and equity within The United Methodist Church, we believe these policies hinder our work and contradict our faith's call to welcome the stranger and advocate for the vulnerable. We are committed to challenging these injustices and standing in solidarity with affected communities and faith leaders." - Rev. Dr. Giovanni Arroyo, General Commission on Religion and Race of The United Methodist Church (GCORR)

"As faithful adherents to the teachings of Jesus Christ, we assert our divinely mandated responsibility to safeguard and nurture all children of God. The spiritual well-being and freedom of worship are fundamental, non-negotiable tenets of our faith. We hereby declare our unequivocal opposition to any and all attempts by the government or other external entities to infringe upon, restrict, or otherwise interfere with the free exercise of religion by members of our congregations." - Rev. Carlos L. Malavé, President, Latino Christian National Network

"Churches are, and have always been, places of prayer, solace, and safety since the time of Jesus Christ; this does not change with any new emperor, king, or president." - Rev. Laura Everett, Executive Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches

"As Methodists, we are called to embrace a posture of radical welcome and hospitality by providing a safe space of welcome to immigrants and the marginalized who are afraid, intimidated, and threatened. We stand beside immigrants, refugees, and others who seek safety and peace and take bold steps to live out our faith—not just talk about it." - Lisa Isom, The New York Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church

"The New York State Council of Churches strongly believes that all people are created in the image of God and need to be offered every measure of kindness and hospitality. The government's efforts to turn our congregations into locations of fear and anxiety is cruel and truly limits our religious practice to offer hospitality without condition. For us there is no greater calling than to confront injustice and welcome immigrants into common life of all 7500 of our congregations." - Rev. Peter Cook, New York State Council of Churches

"One of the most frequent directives found in the Bible is caring for those who come to us from another place. Various descriptions appear--sojourner, immigrant, refugee, etc.--but the directive is the same. Welcome them,

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protect them, treat them like family. Not to be allowed to do so is to be denied a basic tenet of our faith.” - Rev. Dr. Jennifer Copeland, North Carolina Council of Churches

“Our ministry, purpose, and witness depend on our ability to worship freely and peacefully, and to, without prejudice, welcome all. We are grateful for the opportunity to join so many Christian and Jewish denominations in making this reasonable and sound request in order to achieve our mission. Finally, we are thankful for a country built with checks and balances, that allows us the opportunity to pursue a necessary appeal that speaks to the core of our existence.” - Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz, Assistant to the Bishop, The North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church

“Jewish scripture and history combine to make welcoming and protecting immigrants a central religious obligation -- Genesis teaches us that we are all created in the image of God; the Torah insistently repeats 36 times over that we must protect immigrants because we ourselves were once strangers in Egypt; throughout the centuries our forebears were themselves immigrants, who were often desperately in need of refuge. Reconstructionist congregations include immigrants as well as the partners, children and grandchildren of immigrants and our communities are deeply committed to opening our doors to serve those in need, regardless of their legal status. We are pleased to join in this lawsuit because, as the Torah teaches us, we do remember that we were once strangers, and we refuse to surrender our moral and religious obligations as Jews and as human beings.” - Rabbi Deborah Waxman, Ph. D., Reconstructing Judaism

“It was in 1644 that Roger Williams, Rhode Island’s founding thinker, first penned the idea that a freedom of conscious and worship ‘be granted to all people in all nations and countries.’ Since 1937, the Rhode Island State Council of Churches has continued the work of protecting religious freedom and living into our fundamental faith commitments: advocating for the voiceless and resourcing our communities to do the work of justice, love, and peace.” - Jeremy Langill, Executive Minister, Rhode Island State Council of Churches

“Throughout Jewish history, we have known the hardship and persecution of living as immigrants. We are inspired by those experiences across the generations, as well as the repeated biblical commandment to welcome the stranger, to ensure that our congregations remain places where immigrants - including those who may be undocumented - can enter to worship, seek pastoral counsel, learn, socialize, obtain needed services and support, or to act as caregivers for those who do.” - Rabbi Rick Jacobs, Union for Reform Judaism

“As Unitarian Universalists (UUs), fighting for justice and liberation for all people is at the heart of our faith tradition, which recognizes the spark of the divine inherent in every person; our sacred spaces must continue to offer sanctuary to those who face oppression, violence, or alienation, including immigrant communities. UUs are united in our commitment through a set of shared religious values, which include interdependence, pluralism, justice, equity, generosity, and transformation, all of which revolve around Love at the center. Compelled by those values, we will continue to do what Unitarians and Universalists have done throughout our centuries-long history - use our voices and our actions to side with love and help those who are in the greatest need.” - Carey McDonald, Executive Vice President, Unitarian Universalist Association

“Freedom of religion and the safety of religious spaces is essential to the fabric of American society. We are deeply concerned by the change in policy which recognized houses of worship as sensitive spaces in which immigration authorities were restricted from operating. We ask the courts to restore that protection to ensure the safety of our congregants and the preservation of the Constitutional right to freedom of worship.” - Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal, The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and The Rabbinical Assembly

"The Church has long been a sanctuary for all and Church property is a sacred space where the faithful gather to worship, serve, and find community in Christ without fear. The recent rescission of the sensitive locations policy and pronouncements of the administration have placed our congregations at imminent risk of enforcement

actions in these spaces, which would defile our sacred spaces and disrupt worship and ministry. The Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church stands in this lawsuit to affirm that our churches must remain the dwelling places of God, who has set them apart for peace and sanctuary, where the rights of all who enter are upheld, including the rights of the Church to fulfill its mission.” - Bishop Kenneth H. Carter, Jr., The Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church

"Because of these changes in government policy, members of our churches are scared to come to worship, afraid to seek help right now. Jesus calls us to stand alongside those who are afraid. We are here for those in our midst who seek justice and mercy, and will not abandon them.” - Rev. Kerri Parker, Executive Director, Wisconsin Council of Churches

"Houses of worship have always been a safe place for people, no matter who they are. Any attempt by the government to create an atmosphere of mistrust or fear works directly against the mission of faith communities. As WISDOM, we intend to stand against this action by the government and will fight to restore beloved community.” - Rev. Kathleen Gloff, WISDOM, Inc.

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