

# *The Light of Truth*



## **Faith Leaders Bear Witness on the Texas-Mexico Border September 2019**



# About Courts & Ports

**Courts & Ports** provides a unique window into the complex circumstances described as the “border crisis” ongoing on the Texas-Mexico border. Through court monitoring and bridge observation combined with direct interaction with migrants in humanitarian response programs, Courts & Ports participants gain insights into the legal, law enforcement, and human needs aspects of the Administration’s current border security policies.

Participants serve as due process monitors in the federal criminal court in Brownsville, TX. They receive training from ACLU attorneys, and then observe a criminal court hearing where 30-60 immigrants and asylum seekers are prosecuted for crossing the border illegally. Observers are trained to take notes on their observations, especially in cases where there could be a due process violation such as a malfunctioning translation device, degrading language towards a defendant, or a unmet medical need of a defendant. Observers also report major violations such as child separation and asylum cases. Observers’ notes are uploaded into the ACLU’s online repository for use in future research and possible legal action.

Courts & Ports participants also travel from Brownsville into Matamoros Mexico to meet with the asylum seekers waiting on the bridge to be allowed into the United States. Participants meet with asylum seekers, hearing their stories and seeing real-life examples of how the US’s current asylum policy is affecting those running from persecution.



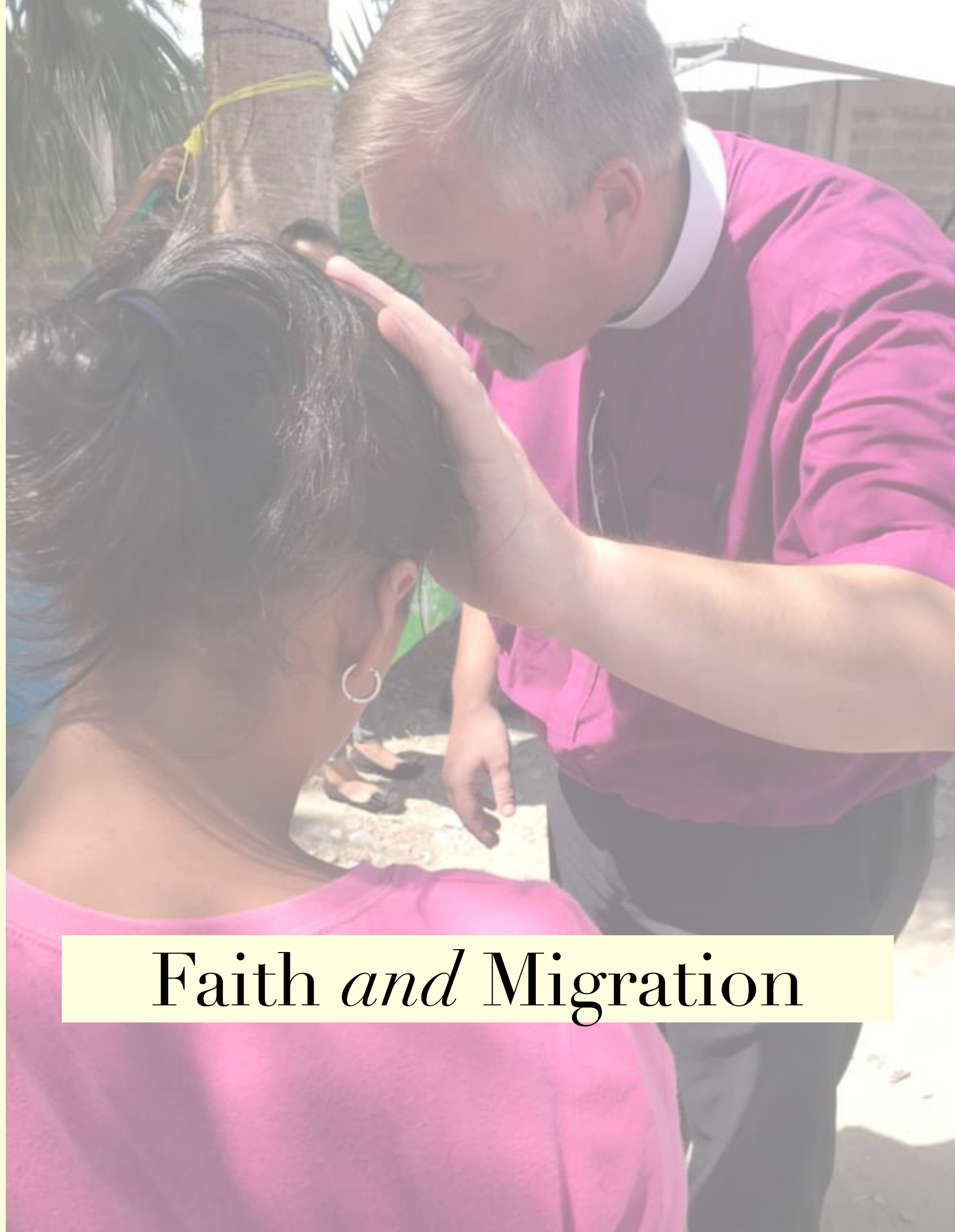
**The Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy and Texas Impact** advance public policies that reflect the common social statements of mainstream faith traditions. We guide individuals and faith organizations through the often-turbulent waters of politics and faith to bring their collective witness and wisdom into the processes of democracy.

When interfaith leaders launched Texas Impact nearly 50 years ago, American mainstream faith communities were on the front lines of advocating for civil rights, economic justice, and peace for all people. While some of the specific issues have changed over the decades, the faith communities’ call for justice, freedom, and peace is as strong today as it was in 1973.

Many people worry that today’s believers are disengaged from the public square, or that the only prophetic voices are coming from extremists. We disagree. Our members are 4 times as likely to vote as other Texans...and they are evenly split between Republicans and Democrats.

**Every generation of Americans and Texans must reaffirm the values of religious freedom, common good, and responsibility to the future.**

**We believe diversity makes Texas stronger, and community makes us better.**



# Faith *and* Migration



# Reverend Mandi Richey

*Genesis Presbyterian Church, Austin TX*



After watching the guests jockey for places at the table, he invites the guests to rethink their places at the table and to imagine new ways of being in relationship with the people they are sharing a meal with. To see that everyone at the table is on equal footing. Jesus is on a roll.... because he then turns to the host of the party and says, "The next time you throw a party don't invite the expected crowd. You know who I mean....your family and neighbors...in other words, everyone here at this party, Instead invite the poor and the lame, the crippled and the blind... invite the migrant, the asylum seeker, the people who will never be able to pay your back or increase your social standing."

Now, I imagine there was shock at this statement. Why give a party at all if it wasn't going to increase your social standing? That's what the culture dictated. Where you sat at a meal and who you sat with at a meal were extremely important things in Biblical times. I can imagine that the host was shocked and offended at these words from Jesus. But Jesus was making a very important point.

What Jesus is teaching here is clearly a paradox: the way up is down, the way down is up. It takes a whole lot of faith and courage to believe that appearing to do the opposite is the very thing that will, in time, grant your desired outcome. Scripture is filled with paradoxes: if you want to have, you must give away, if you want to live, you must be willing to die; if you want to be great, you must be willing to become a servant. Greatness comes not through self-elevation, not who you sit by at a banquet, but through humility and becoming a servant.

This parable taught by Jesus is a leveling of sorts. It's not a switching of elevations; it's not making some higher and others lower. It's realizing that we are all on the same footing in God's kingdom.

And friends this doesn't just apply to meal times. This teaching of Jesus is about how we treat one another all of the time, especially those who are not in a position to "pay us back." Jesus is calling us to the kind of people watching he does. Watching with eyes not of judgement or for entertainment, but watching with eyes of love. Watching for a chance to share God's grace across boundaries.

So....who are we watching, my friends? Who are we noticing? And what are we giving our attention to? And perhaps most importantly of all, what are we doing in light of what we see?

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives." For King, the beloved community was a society with economic and social justice for all. It was a society in which the color of your skin, your ethnic background, or your religious affiliation were not your fundamental identity. Every person is a beloved child of God, made in the image of God, deserving of love and respect and dignity. The beloved community was God's vision for society.

So what will we do? What will we do? Will we participate in a social leveling of the field so that the beloved community might become a reality here on earth? Will we fight for it? Amen.



# Reverend Marc Corazao

## *First United Methodist Church, Lewisville TX*

One woman named Carla, seeing that we were a group of pastors, made a point of telling us that just the night before we came, there was a young man among them who had a vision. He was 22 years old and had been waiting for months to try and have a hearing to receive asylum in the United States. In great despair, he was preparing to give up, but he said that God had come to him in a vision to tell everyone who was waiting in the “camp” in Matamoros that they would all receive a special blessing from God.

This message seemed to give Carla and her companions some hope – maybe even a fool’s hope, but hope nonetheless. Because I want to believe this young man’s vision. I want to believe that God is looking out for them, just as God has always looked out for those in distress and under the thumb of those more powerful. I want to believe that God even now is working to break down the barriers that we erect to divide us from one another. Though countries have lines on maps that separate us, the love of the kingdom of God knows no borders. We must not wring our hands as if there were nothing that could be done or pretend that people’s suffering is someone else’s problem – not if we follow the God of justice and mercy.





# Reverend Erica Knisely

## *Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin TX*

When I was in McAllen learning about our government's current approach to asylum-seekers I was struck by something Mike Seifert of the ACLU said: "This is our crucifixion right now." I wondered: How so? And is it truly ours?

Then, I met the children living in a makeshift tent village just across the border in Matamoros, Mexico. Flying in the face of the Geneva Convention, they've been sent to Mexico with their parents to wait for their asylum claim to be heard. They call this the "Migrant Protection Protocol," and it's anything but. Many of these families face certain death were they to return to their home countries of Honduras or El Salvador. But we send them to Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, Juarez, like sheep to the wolves. The cartels size them up, stalk them, and wait for the right moment to strike: to kidnap young women, steal young children, demand money where there is none. The children sleep on burning concrete in tents with no running water, have no showers save the Rio Grande, and have very little to eat.

And yet I saw only smiles and laughter on the faces of the children I met. The little boy who kept giggling as a pastor prayed with his family, the baby nestled sweetly asleep on her mother's shoulder, and Celeste, whose round face and big, brown eyes beamed as we sang her, Happy Birthday. So innocent and unaware of the wolves circling nearby.

You want to know where to look for Jesus in our world today? Look in Matamoros. He is sleeping on his mother's weary shoulder. She is delighted at turning six. He is giggling in the middle of a somber circle. Jesus, the Christ child is there, born into the world to bear hope in a desperate situation.

His parents are standing nearby, keeping watch. They are tired from the journey. It's a long way from Bethlehem to Egypt. From Honduras to the United States. They have walked so far, but now the way is closed. And I wonder.... Will these parents have to watch their sons and daughters be crucified upon the cross? Will they be made into a public symbol of "deterrence," of political might in action? Will these parents' hearts echo the words: Why, O Lord, have you forsaken me?

Is this truly our crucifixion? Do we have any share in it? Where are we in this story?

Are we standing far off while Jesus weeps alone in the garden of Gethsemane? While he weeps alone behind a chain link fence?

Are we with Peter in the courtyard denying we know this Jesus? They aren't our children, are they?

Are we standing at the foot of the cross with his parents as the sky darkens? The light in their eyes, the glimmer of hope that made this journey possible, now gone.

Perhaps the most important question we can ask ourselves right now is not where we are, but where we will choose to be hereafter. Will we make this crucifixion ours?





# Reverend Carolyn Albert-Donovan

## *Peace Lutheran Church, Round Rock TX*

One teacher from my faith tradition, Martin Luther, says it is our job "to call a thing what it is." Ida B. Wells was saying something similar when she said, "The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them." It is time to examine our values. The Migrant Protection Protocols are no such thing. And concern with security without love and justice leads us down the inevitable path of real human lives being ground up in the gears of a security apparatus that cares nothing for love or justice or humanity.

Just across the Gateway Bridge (an easy passage for someone like me who holds a blue booklet...a U.S. passport...which I did nothing to earn), I met a young mother, with a fourteen-month-old on her shoulder - naked but for a diaper, some rubber shoes, and a small beaded bracelet...a tiny token of love in a loveless place. Her husband is in Houston. She has been camping for a month with no running water or air conditioning and will have to survive under the watch of the cartel for a month more before she can even come to our immigration courts to ask if she might be considered to enter into the hope that is life in the United States. At each hurdle she passes... she will have to come and go...into and out of the U.S...which will make securing any kind of legal counsel almost impossible.



She is stuck in between the home that became "the mouth of a shark" (as Warsan Shire describes in her poem about the refugee's painful journey)...and the hope for the future that is life in our great country.

We tell ourselves this strange lie... "There isn't enough"... "We don't have enough"...to share with these suffering strangers who are clinging to a hope whose home is called The United States of America. When did we begin to believe we were so small and so weak? When did we stop dreaming about doing great big things that could turn the world...that could shine the light of hope where it seemed impossible?

That young mother and her baby girl needs us to find our faith again. She waits with so many others. We are not protecting her now...no matter what the protocols are called. That is the truth we must tell...calling a thing what it is. We are not protecting her. But we can. We can protect migrants...even while we protect those who are already at home here. Love and justice can be the friends of safety and security. And I have great hope that the light of truth can shine on us and reveal the better angels of our nature...so we are not lead by fear but by faith...faith in who we are meant to be and what we can do to help and heal the suffering at our Southern border, and throughout the world.



# good news

by Reverend

Stephanie

Evelyn

McKellar

"How beautiful are the feet  
Of those  
That bring  
Good news"

But what of these shoes?  
And the feet they carry?  
Worn and collapsing  
From miles  
And countries  
Of travel

Blistered  
Calloused  
These shoes decay  
Betray  
The weary feet within them.  
Wear and tear  
Threadbare  
These shoes  
Never meant to support  
such a long and unsupported journey.

These feet  
They protect  
I neglect  
Satisfied to look elsewhere  
Seeking my own  
(national) 'security'

Good news  
For these feet  
Should have come long before  
This day  
In other forms of support.

Where is the good news  
For these feet?  
Who will they meet  
Along each journeyed street  
Who may bring them

News  
Of comfort  
Compassion  
Dignity  
Laws that protect them  
Guides that direct them  
To the safe passage  
They need.

We are well equipped  
Indeed.

Do we have good news?  
If the church,  
Shouldn't we?

If God exists,  
The divine surely  
Walks with these weary,  
Defends these orphans,  
Instead of detains.

What of our good news?  
These feet may speak  
More truth  
As we ignore their human faces.  
The system  
Displaces  
Their stories  
Buried at the border  
We comfort ourselves with legal policy  
Neglecting our own responsibility  
To be bearers  
And cultivators  
Of good news.

The news I bring  
So far  
Is simply  
'I'm here to listen  
And learn'  
But do I care  
Enough  
To bring them  
and their news  
Into my home  
And share  
My security?

Our good news we preach  
Does it remain  
True  
for all, or just  
Me and you?



Attend to these feet  
And the faces they carry  
Let them breathe  
Let us not tarry  
To provide the good news  
We claim  
For our selves

what of the  
gifts & stories  
Their feet bear?  
Bare  
Exposed  
Out from under  
Tyranny  
Desperate to be  
Known  
Home  
And safe.

Perhaps these feet  
Know more of the  
Goodness of news  
Than we  
Perhaps it is they  
Who could teach us  
Something  
Of what is truly  
Worth saving

We cannot see her face  
But we may study her feet  
'What do you need  
To see  
Of me  
To know and honor  
my dignity,  
my  
humanity?

**When will  
These feet be  
worthy  
Of our good news?**







# Stories of Asylum Seekers





# Reverend Kim Smith-Stanley

## *Round Rock Presbyterian Church, Round Rock TX*

I prayed with three single moms and their children, and the translator. We were gathered in a circle with the sun beating down on us with our arms around the moms and around the children, and I cried—not little tears but big tears—and the moms cried big tears as well. I looked down in this tight circle of people, all holding each other, and I saw this little man, David. He was four. He looked up at me with his big brown eyes beneath curly brown hair, and he saw me crying, and he smiled and giggled to himself. While we prayed, I reached down and touched his head, and I made the sign of the cross on his forehead, and I laughed back at him. Each of the children looked up at me, and I touched their heads and made the sign of the cross on their foreheads as we prayed, and I pleaded with God to bless the little children.



When we were done praying, I asked the moms if I could hug them, and I hugged them for a long time and whispered in their ears: "I am so sorry. I am so sorry this is happening. God loves you. God loves you." I held those mamas close and I did not want to let go. As a mother myself, I know that I too would go to any length to protect my sweet cubs, to provide for them the opportunities of living in a safe place with clean water to drink, fresh food to eat, a place to take a bath with soap and shampoo, and a bathroom with a toilet to use in privacy.

We asked the women, "What do you need right now?" They replied, "We need water. We have had nothing to drink all day." When the clergy crossed the border, we were told that immigration would only allow us to bring across the bridge enough water for us to drink, so many of us shared our water bottles with the kids and had them drink all that was left. These sweet babies drank deep gulps of cool, clear, clean water, and life flowed back into their young bodies. The moms, of course, were waiting for their babies to finish, and if there was anything left over when their children were done, they also drank.

The six hundred people living in those tents are waiting for their court dates in the United States to try and seek asylum. Many of them have families somewhere in the U.S. who are waiting for them. Of the many people we met, most have court dates set for October. In the meantime, there is no place for them to go, no place to rest their heads. I cannot imagine how they will survive out there for another month, or two, or beyond, as their first court date will likely end up having them sent back to Mexico until the next court date.

When I think about caring for the earth and for caring for God's precious creation, I think about the Genesis story, and I remember that we, God's people, were not created good, but God created us very good—made in the image of God.



# Reverend Lora Brandis

## *Horizon Unitarian Universalist Church, Carrollton, TX*

Friday afternoon, about eighty clergy crossed the border into Matamoros, walked across the road and listened to the stories of those who sit and wait. We went in groups of seven or eight, led by Spanish speakers. As our group made its way into the edge of what we were told would be about 500 people waiting, a man approached me asking if some of the pastores would come and visit their encampment. I speak enough Spanish to tell him that I would get our leader who is a better translator than I am.

A common thread ran through the stories we heard. There were several stories of a young daughter being at school for the day and a gang member making a visit to the parent informing them they knew where their child was and if they didn't pay a particular price that they would never see their child again. Most left immediately, riding on buses and trucks or walking to Mexico. Most had been in Mexico for several months making their way towards the border. They had been at the border for one or two months, sleeping in small tents provided by aid organizations. Someone usually brings water – two bottles per person per day. Sometimes there is food. The children and women eat first.

We listened to a man who said that people don't believe them. He said, "The immigrant agents don't believe our stories. I'm not in a gang," he said. He lifted up his shirt for us like he did with the agent, showing the absence of tattoos. In the awkward pause that followed, I asked Ezequiel (our translator) to tell him that we believe him. That we would carry his story with us to people who would believe him.





# Reverend Bill Gaventa

## *The Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, Austin TX*

In short, Trump administration protocols do not protect potential immigrants or asylum-seekers. It makes their lives more dangerous because they are powerless against Mexican cartels. They certainly cannot go home and face the gangs and conditions that led them to flee in the first place. They now face similar thugs in Mexico. Thus, "protocol" becomes just another name for putting more impediments in front of desperate people. In one respect the word is accurate, because its true purpose seems to be to protect the United States from immigrants or asylum-seekers, especially from Central America. We once accepted about 90,000 refugees each year from around the world. This year it will be around 30,000, with that figure projected to drop to 10,000.

If this is our country's message to the world, then we are in full denial of our history and the laws and policies that made the United States a beacon of freedom and opportunity. We are in full denial of the fact that immigrants and refugees have brought new energy, hope and vision to our country. We are in full denial of the fact that they come because they know their extended families in other parts of our country will help them fit in. If we want to really help, we would up the number of immigration judges and courts so asylum-seekers could be seen promptly.

The people I met just wanted their kids to grow up someplace safe. Even the U.S. detention centers amid their overcrowded conditions are safer than where they are now. But cross the border and listen for yourself. If we were in their shoes, you and I might not only swell the ranks seeking asylum but wonder about everything we'd ever heard about the land of the brave and the free.



# Reverend Gordon Blackman

## *Alpine Presbyterian Church, Longview TX*

A caravan of pastors invaded Mexico. We were met by persons holding children telling stories of desperate circumstances in their home countries. Those our small group talked to were from El Salvador, Mexico, and Honduras. All were parents wanting a better life for their children. Some were fleeing gangs and extortion. Some were leaving a place where their children had no future.

Not one asked for a handout. All were patiently standing in blazing heat which was uncomfortable for us for the few hours we were there. All had been there for multiple weeks, living in mountain tents pitched on hard ground. These innocent persons were patiently waiting for an opportunity to tell their story to someone who would listen.

We listened and prayed with them. While asking them to wait in Mexico sounds logical, the result is a large group of vulnerable people under the watchful eyes of predatory cartels. What is being called the MPP (migrant protection plan) is actually creating opportunities for criminals to prey on the weak. We need a better way.

It has been said that God will judge a country based on how it treats the weakest among them. We need a better way.





# for only a quarter

*by* Reverend Stephanie Evelyn McKellar

It costs me  
a quarter  
To cross  
this border  
to get back into the States  
A quarter  
To get across  
And back  
IN.

A quarter.

So free,  
Some days  
found carelessly  
lost  
on the ground  
So insufficient  
To measure the safety of a life  
A life  
Also often lost  
On this desert  
And deserted  
ground  
Your life and story  
deserted  
Often found  
After you've taken great risk  
At great cost  
To make your way through  
Hoping  
Someone will notice your need  
On the other side

Respond to your plea  
And provide  
For a path to arrive safely  
In the arms of compassion  
In the aim of justice  
In the work of mercy.  
You deserve this  
For your life  
To matter  
To be worth more  
Than a quarter.

A turnstile  
A bridge  
Multiple layers of walls  
We've built the barriers  
We claim you violate  
A desert  
Used as a weapon  
To funnel your life into forgotten soil

We drove down on a bus  
To make the trip  
That others die taking.

A quarter  
Is all my privilege cost me.  
A quarter.  
I wish I could give you  
The same simplicity  
For safety  
Afforded to me.

**NO!**  **NO!**

**DÓLAR PESOS**  
**\$0.25 C. \$4.00**



**FAVOR DE  
DEPOSITAR 4  
MONEDAS DE**









A photograph of a public gathering, possibly a protest or a community event. In the foreground, there is a paved area with a yellow curb. Several tents are set up, including a prominent white and blue tent on the left and a blue and grey tent on the right. A person in a red shirt is walking between the tents. In the background, a large crowd of people is gathered under the shade of a large tree. The overall scene suggests a significant public event.

*The Experience  
of Witness*



# Reverend Nohemi Ramirez

*First United Methodist Church/Casa de Esperanza, Sherman, TX*

Hola, soy la pastora Nohemi Ramirez, y voy a tratar de compartir con ustedes. Disculpen si la emoción me gana. Tengo 23 años en el ministerio trabajando con ministerios hispanos. He oído miles de historias, he estado acompañado a muchas familias a través de todos estos años en situaciones diferentes, pero creo que esta es la primera vez que me toca ver tan de cerca la deshumanización. La injusticia, el dolor. Le doy gracias a Dios porque soy bendecida de estar en un país de la abundancia. Donde puedo abrir la llave del agua y darme un baño, donde puedo tomar agua, donde tengo un plato para comer una comida caliente.

Y Podríamos pasar toda la tarde compartiendo las muchas historias que escuchamos. Familias con muchos niños, eso es quizá la parte más difícil, porque como madre yo creo que entiendo las razones que ellos tienen para dejar todo y venir aquí. Ah... 6 días. 6 días en un calor de casi 102 grados, sin bañarse. Eso es lo que tienen esas familias ahí, porque no hay manera que tengan acceso a un baño para tomar un baño. Me decían, tenemos que bañarnos en el río. Los niños tienen enfermedades en la piel, las madres se ven desesperadas. Mi oración con ellos., y hablando con ellos hubiera querido hacer algo en ese momento, pero creo que esto nos habla de que tenemos que movernos a hacer algo. No es solamente venir y ver, ahora nos toca accionar. Ahora entiendo porque Jesús dijo que nos toca a nosotros alimentar, cubrir, visitar. Porque todo lo que hagamos por uno de estos pequeños lo estamos haciendo para el Señor. Esta experiencia me ha cambiado la vida, pero también creo que me reafirma el porque estoy donde estoy. Y especialmente para aquellas personas que no han entendido porqué me tuve que mover de un lugar para otro, y cuando le pregunto al Señor porque me mandaste a una iglesia donde tengo que hablar inglés, mi inglés no es tan bueno,... ahora entiendo



porque! Hoy me toco liderar a un grupo de 9 pastores para traducirles y para explicarles todas las historias y traducirles y compartir con ellos. Y creo que pues fue doble el impacto: a la hora de oírlas y a la hora de compartirlas es un impacto muy grande. Estoy sobrepasada y mi corazón está muy dolido por todo lo que vi. Gracias

## English translation:

Hi, I'm Pastor Nohemi Ramirez, and I will try to share with you. Sorry if emotion beats me. I have 23 years in the ministry working with Hispanic ministries. I have heard thousands of stories, I have accompanied many families throughout all these years in different situations, but I think this is the first time I had been able to see dehumanization so closely. The injustice, the pain. I thank God because I am blessed to be in a country of abundance. Where I can open the water tap and take a bath, where I can drink water, where I have a plate to eat a hot meal. I could spend the whole afternoon sharing the many stories we hear. Families with many children, that is perhaps the most difficult part, because as a mother I think I understand the reasons they have for leaving everything and coming here. Ah ... six days. Six days in a heat of almost 102 degrees, without bathing. That is what these families have there, because there is no way they have access to a bathroom to take a bath. They told me, we have to bathe in the river. Children have skin diseases, mothers are desperate. My prayer with them, and speaking with them, I would have liked to do something more at that time, but I think this tells us that we have to move to do something. It's not just come and see, now it's our turn to act. Now I understand why Jesus said it is our turn to feed, cover, visit. Because everything we do for one of these little ones we are doing for the Lord. This experience has changed my life, but I also believe that it reaffirms why I am where I am. And especially for those who have not understood why I had to move from one place to another, and when I ask the Lord why you sent me to a church where I have to speak English, my English is not so good, ... now I understand why! Today I had to lead a group of nine pastors to translate and explain all the stories and translate and share with them. And I think that the impact was double: at the time of hearing them and at the time of sharing them it is a very big impact. I am overwhelmed and my heart is very hurt by everything I saw. Thank you





# Dr. Larry Duggins

## *Mission Wisdom Foundation, Southlake TX*

This week, several MWF folk joined a pilgrimage to the Mexican border sponsored by Texas Impact, a non-profit focused on lobbying for humane changes in immigration policy. The trip was an opportunity for pastors and lay leaders to travel to the border to hear from experts involved in the immigration struggle and to meet refugees awaiting processing on the Mexican border. The group included people from all over Texas and from a wide range of denominations. Our team travelled by bus twelve hours each way to and from Dallas.

On Friday afternoon, we walked along the razor-wired border wall to the bridge to Matamoros. We walked over the bridge, across the stream that is the Rio Grande at this time of year, and on to the plaza on the Mexican side of the border. There were groups of people, mostly family groups, sitting together in every spot of shade. There were no police or security people in sight, which really surprised me as we had heard rumors of rampant cartel activity in the area. A tent city was situated in an area close to the border station, taking advantage of the few trees that cast a little shade.

We broke into groups and began speaking to the people we encountered. Many had fled from gang violence in Honduras, and had come to apply for asylum in the US because they feared for their lives and the lives of their families. I was shocked by the number of young women we met either alone or in small groups – they fled sexual violence and exploitation, only to be forced into a tent city where they remained so vulnerable.

At one point, a few of us spoke with a young woman with a small child in her arms. As Pastor Amy gathered her story, the little girl reached out to me. I held her hand for a few minutes, and she then leaned over as little kids do for me to take her in my arms. I looked to her mom, got an ok nod, and took her. She immediately went for my glasses, and we played putting them on her, and then back on me, then back on her. We did the same with my hat, playing peekaboo until she laughed. The idea that she and her mom will have to wait another 45 days exposed to the elements and the predators until they get to present their asylum claim haunts me.

Our government's policies are punitive and inhumane, pushing the most vulnerable into the arms of the cartels. These are not terrorists or murderers – they are people running for their lives. Scripture is so clear about care for the poor and the immigrant, so as the administration policies grow increasingly harsh, it is up to the churches to intervene and act. At the Missional Wisdom Foundation, we are brainstorming about possibilities for using our experience in intentional housing to help churches sponsor refugees who legally enter the US in order to reduce the backlog at the border. We will keep you informed about how your church can participate. The inhumanity of our current system has to change, and we can all be a part of the solution.



# Reverend Cindy Carroll

## *Emanuel Lutheran Church, Dallas TX*

The Texas Impact Courts and Ports Advocacy Intensive opened up my mind and heart to what is happening at the Mexican/American border.

The legal and the political aspects of the situation are a complicated entangled web but now I have some better understanding of the complexities of the situation and the challenges that lawyers and other justice advocacy organizations are dealing with on a day to day basis as they try to support and help asylum seekers and immigrants.

I'm deeply grateful for Dr. Asante's Todd's theological framing of these issues especially framing questions like: "Who is the sovereign in our contemporary context?" and "What does our faith have to say about so much focus on national security?" and "What is God's vision of justice?" The experience of the trip that touched my heart and soul was a walk across the "Gateway Bridge" from Brownsville to Matamoros so that we could meet with asylum seekers and to hear their stories. Listening to their stories about how they got to the border and challenges they face as they seek legal entry into our country is heart-wrenching.

I went away wondering how I could be a witness and accompany asylum seekers and immigrants in my own context. I'm not sure how the seeds that God has planted in my heart, mind, and soul are going grow and bear fruit because of this enlightening opportunity and experience.





# Kay Schecht

*Plymouth Park United Methodist Church, Irving TX*

The sorrow I feel is twofold. It is for both the immigrants and for our country. The pain of the asylum seekers is our pain as U.S. citizens and as believers in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Christ beckoned the little children to come to him. He healed the sick and cared for the poor. The United States has been known to be a country that offered rest for the weary, welcomed immigrants, and cared for the poor. Today our country weeps because those values have been forsaken.

As Christians, we must **STAND UP AND SPEAK UP** to reinstate the morals for which we were once so proud. We are not mean, we are not cruel, we love and care for all God's creations, including His people, no matter their country, culture, language, or color of their skin. We are kind, we are good, and it is up to us to cure the dreadful scourge upon our souls that threatens our morality. If religious communities unite, they will be the power that is needed to eliminate the hate and greed that has been slowly destroying the soul of our country. We must be soldiers of the cross.





# Rev. Mally Baum

*Trinity Presbyterian Church, McKinney TX*

I can't help but think of the M.S. St. Louis, a ship full of over 900 passengers, most of whom were fleeing Nazi Germany as the persecution of the Jews there reached a fever pitch. The ship was turned away at multiple ports in multiple countries, including the United States. Ultimately the St. Louis had no other recourse but to return to Germany. History has not looked kindly upon the decision to exclude them, because a third of those on board the ship died in concentration camps.

After visiting the crowded, makeshift camp for asylum seekers located just a short walk, but for many an unattainable distance from U.S. soil, and hearing story after desperate story of vulnerable families fleeing unthinkable violence, I find myself wondering how history will judge us. I fear it won't be pretty.





# man-made

by Reverend  
Stephanie  
Evelyn  
McKellar

I wonder  
What the birds think  
As they sit and gaze  
At our man-made  
Borders  
Walls  
Divisions of difference  
Stifling freedom of movement  
Imposing  
laws that bind  
Subjecting  
bodies to abuse

What will help us unwind  
from our entangled ferocity  
We are chained  
to our:

hatred  
fear(ful) narratives  
I am chained  
By my fear  
My search for security  
That rejects another's dignity  
And right to simply live  
In safety.  
Unfurl our feathers in the sunlight  
release each other  
And our selves  
Into a community  
That loves caring for one another  
More than it loves binding each other

We write this story  
We ignore the song  
Of the one seeking  
The chance to be  
and breathe freely

Let our bodies  
Untangle  
From the rhetoric that binds us  
Untie us  
So we might set all wings free  
To simply fly  
To a nest  
with a song  
Without which we remain incomplete.







*Policy and Action*



# Reverend Wally Butts

## *First United Methodist Church, Bells TX*



What can I do? Alone, maybe not so much, but together, we can do the unimaginable!

On Sunday morning, I recounted these events and the stories I had heard... of a Nicaraguan soldier who defied presidential orders to fire on protesters and fled with his family in the middle of the night... of a young Honduran mother holding a baby and asking for prayers for her mother who was too sick to make the journey along with her three other children she had to leave behind... of a group of Cubans who had just been released from a US detention center back into Mexico with no idea where they could find shelter

or food... And I also shared testimony about a small group of pastors spending our bus ride home making arrangements for meaningful help and connections for a young woman with nowhere to turn.

As I recounted all of these stories, along with lamenting the many obstacles our government keeps throwing into this situation, I knew that I needed to make a "call to action" – to urge people to connect with our leaders and to make their voice – and the voice of the voiceless – heard. But the congregation I serve is rural, and most are very conservative in their politics, and so I refrained from "going too far" in that moment. As I announced the final hymn of the morning, a leader in our congregation – a law enforcement officer – asked if he could say a few words. Already running late, and not sure what he would say, I said, "Certainly," and held my breath.

This leader addressed the congregation, reminding them of his oath to uphold the law, and that there are definitely many bad people who want to enter our country. He then recounted a mission trip our church made to build a home for a family in Juarez a number of years ago – and he remembered the many kind, hard-working people he encountered there. And with tears in his eyes, he said that when he sees people seeking to enter our country, he knows in his heart that the vast majority are good people who simply want what we all want – a safe place to raise our families. He then said if it were him in that same situation, he has no doubt that he would seek to enter this country however possible – legally or illegally; nothing would stop him. And then he recounted how in my sermon I had urged everyone to ask, What can I do? – and then said there was one thing the pastor left out – and it's the most important and critical thing that each of us must do. "Starting right now, we need to make phone calls, send emails and write letters to our representatives at all levels and let them know that what is happening is unacceptable and that we are watching their decisions very closely."

# Reverend Kevin Johnson

## *St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Arlington TX*

As Christians, we must ask ourselves what kind of laws we want – do they preserve and protect life or not? Do they promote human welfare and dignity, or decrease it? What kind of responsibility do we have toward these asylum seekers? What is the right Christian response? We all must read Scripture, talk among ourselves with curious minds, and come to our own conclusions.

What I have tried to do here is to present you with what we saw (including some photos), what we have been told by people working with border ministries to help you think about this issue, and some interviews with the people stuck on the border. I have also listed some links for you to check out for yourself. I have tried to be as accurate as I can in reporting this. Wherever you come down on this, human beings are suffering at our nation's borders, including many children. What is our responsibility to these human beings?

If you think our elected officials are doing a good job please let them know. If you think there could be some adjustments, please let them know. As the 1845 Texas Constitution proclaimed, "All political power is inherent in the people and all free governments are founded on their authority and instituted for their benefit."



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**U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection**



# Reverend Leslie King

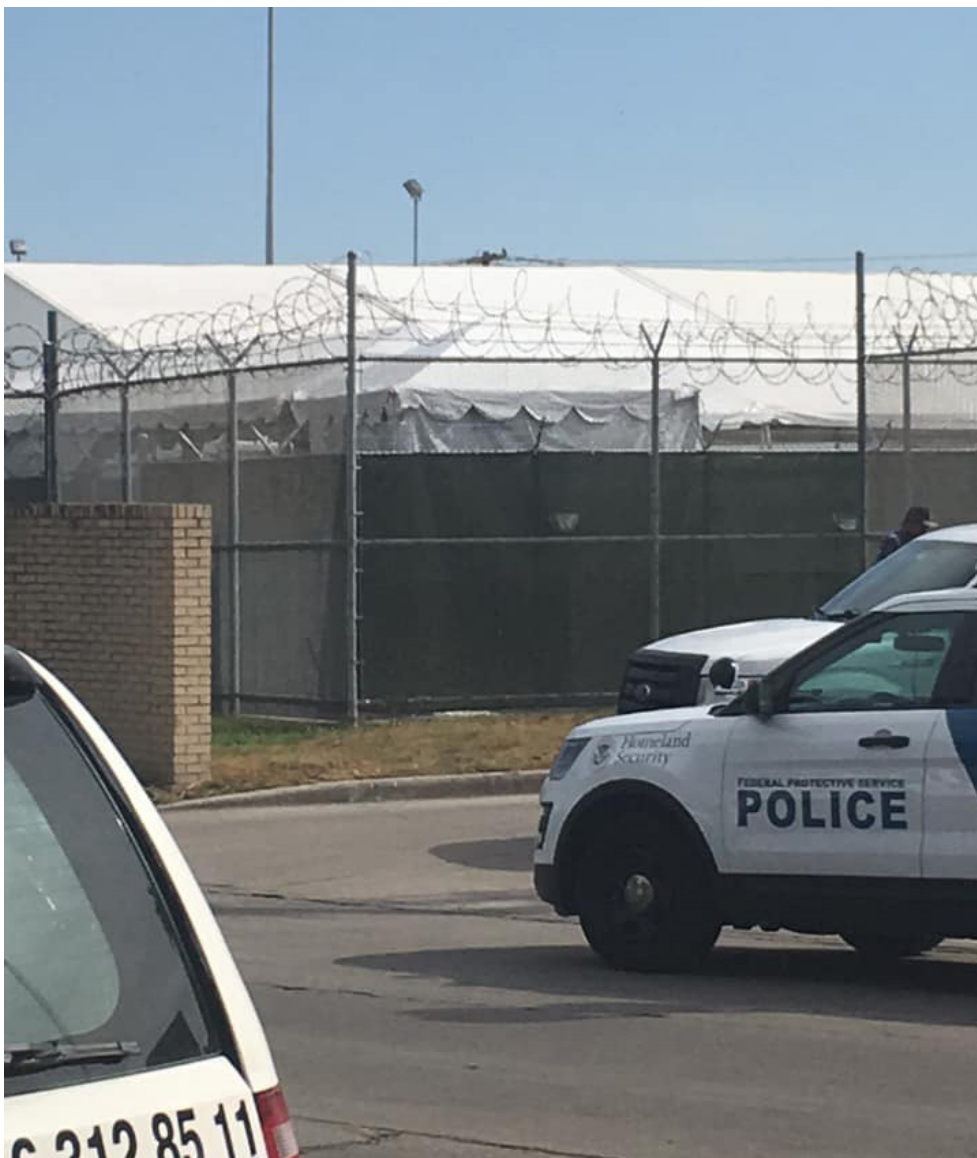
## *First Presbyterian Church, Waco TX*

It struck me that in none of my conversations with migrants did they seem impatient or demanding. They did not complain about tent cities. They were traumatized to be sure, but they seemed hopeful that they were so close to the beacon of America strength and light. Like the trees we stood underneath, our conversations ran below the surface of our skin color and social circumstances. Those conversations stretched out underneath us and for a while, I felt we were on common ground. It was difficult to tell where my humanity stopped and theirs began. There, over our conversations, the wind blew; thought and prayer, like seeds, were caught in an updraft. There we stood toe to toe, rooted for an hour and a half that seemed like only a handful of moments to me.

In my vocation as a pastor, one of the things that I spend most of my time doing is managing time and people toward sacred and holy ends. My sympathy is with our federal government and border patrol agents for the dangerous job it is to manage people as they flood our borders. One of my colleagues at work, Laura Streetman, likened the government dilemma to a plumber who was trying to fix a drain in the middle of a

flood. What plumber would first not deal with the source of the flooding before attending to the drain. It seems to me, if we care about American borders, we will want strategic diplomacy to deal with the source of the current flood of migrants.

This requires an administration that knows how to attend to the nuanced art of democracy. The art of democracy requires presence and conversation among nations who have less resources and, in some instances, more complex problems. The art of democracy is to be present throughout the world in respectful but courageous ways in order to call other administrations into better relationship with their people. The art of democracy shares American compassion like seeds that can be planted locally throughout the world so that the people of the world do not have to seek shelter at a foreign border but can live well in the places they love the most. We need immigration to be a diplomatic issue rather than a criminal issue.



# Reverend Sheron Patterson

## *The Park United Methodist Church, Dallas, TX*

We saw children of God wedged in the latest immigration predicament known as the "Remain in Mexico." Policy. The refugees caught in this policy are the ones who successfully flee violence and danger in their homeland and manage not to get kidnapped along the way. When they arrive at a U.S. Port of Entry seeking asylum, they are given a court date and told to go back to Mexico and wait.

This cruel U.S. policy shoves them back into extremely dangerous Mexican cities to wait. They have no money to wait with. All their funds were spent to get here. Now they sit in misery and dread. There is a backlog of immigration cases in the U.S., more than 800,000. And these are the folks entering the U.S. legally.

Matamoros is hot. It was 98 degrees with a heat index surely over 100 degrees when we were there. We sat on the ground beside men, women and children who are literally sitting ducks for violent and vicious gangs that prowl the border. There were sick babies, women with tears running down their faces, men looking overwhelmed.

Via a translator we heard a group of Cuban asylum seekers tell us that they fled their island due to hunger. A group from Honduras explained that they ran due to violence and Danger.

Most of us cannot fathom becoming a refugee. Immigrant Warsan Shire summons it up like this in her gut punching poem, "Home." "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark. You only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well..."  
Again, America is attempting to turn a blind eye to the desperately poor, traumatized, non-English speaking refugees. The refugees matter and they join a long line of other people that our nation would like to ignore.

It was necessary for me to be a witness to such atrocities in my own backyard. I follow my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in his compassion for the stranger, his command to feed those without food, and his direction to give to those who cannot reciprocate.

As an African American clergywomen with social justice flowing in her blood, I processed this experience via the lens of moral outrage. These atrocities are sadly more of the same. The asylum seekers I saw on the border live like the thousands of homeless people in our cities. The asylum seekers looked like me, brown and black skinned dehumanized and dismissed.

Why care? Small injustices, if left unchecked can morph into huge injustices. Wrong has a way of spreading, when good people sit back and assume it does not impact them.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr said, "Injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere."

### **Please join me in demanding that our government:**

**End** the "Migrant Protection Program" and reject policies intended to prevent migrants from claiming asylum in the US

**Fund** the civil immigration system to process migrants timely

**Reject** proposals that permit indefinite detention of families and children

**Invite** human and civil rights observers to inspect and monitor US treatment of vulnerable migrants





They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;  
**but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,  
and no one shall make them afraid;**  
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

Micah 4:3-4