

What is the Church's Role in Keeping Families Together?

Rise & Shine, July 28th

Ruth 4:14-15

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." (For context, read 4:13-17.)

Questions:

1. What obstacles hinder people in the church from stepping up to help keep families at risk of separation together?
2. Besides violent crime and neglect, what are the legitimate factors that should lead to family separation?
3. What should Redeemer be doing to aid the Episcopal Church's effort in standing up for immigrants and refugees?
4. What is the risk inherent in the Episcopal Church violating federal and local laws as a means to support families?

In the News

As Families are Separated by War and Other Trauma, Churches Take Action

Family separation happens for many reasons (war, natural disaster, loss, politics, discord, divorce, death, etc.), adding its own stress to whatever event or situation precipitated it. Whether or not reunification is possible or desired by family members, family separation typically leaves emotional wounds that can be felt long after the original event.

On our own southern border, up to five migrant children are still separated from their families every day, according to a report by The American Immigration Council based on government data. Although the administration announced the end of its Zero Tolerance policy a year ago, almost 400 more children were separated between June 2018 and March 2019, including 108 under the age of 5. And, even more families are being separated by deportation policies.

As political tensions grow in Washington over looming deportation raids, pending plans for humanitarian aid on the border and the treatment of migrant children held in U.S. detention centers, the Episcopal Church and churches everywhere are stepping up their advocacy and outreach on immigration issues.

“This news of new raids and mass deportations threatens to make these fears real, as families are torn apart and members of our communities and congregations are wrenched away from lives they have labored for years to build,” Diocese of Chicago Bishop Jeffrey Lee said in a statement issued on June 21.

Bishop David Reed in West Texas issued a statement on June 20, World Refugee Day, calling on his diocese to support immigration ministries. He asked that Episcopalians set aside political differences to care for all in need, as Jesus taught.

“We can and should, and desperately need to, have informed, respectful debate on our country’s immigration laws and policies. But the time for that is not when a weary, confused, and hungry person stands before you,” Reed said, whether that person is an asylum-seeker or a Border Patrol agent.

A joint statement from 6 ecumenical leaders, including Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, addressed the issue of children in detention more broadly: “Our houses of worship and agencies have welcomed, engaged and served many migrant families that have recently arrived in the U.S.,” the statement reads. “These migrants have left their communities to provide safety for their children and protect them from harm. ... We urge the Administration to maintain its commitment to international law and defend human rights by implementing safeguards to ensure the safety and health of all of those seeking protection in our land, especially those children who fall under our care.”

In July 2018, during General Convention in Austin, Texas, three resolutions related to immigration were passed. One of the resolutions took a forceful stand against family separation and unjust treatment of immigrant parents and children. Another emphasized respecting the dignity of immigrants. The third encouraged Episcopalians to seek ways to offer sanctuary or support to immigrants. Churches are considered “sensitive locations” that traditionally are not targeted for immigration enforcement, and many churches have

committed to providing physical sanctuary for immigrants inside church walls.

With roots in the 1980s sanctuary movement that offered refuge to Central Americans fleeing war, the new sanctuary movement has been growing in recent years in response to rising animosity toward immigrants and the anti-immigration policies of the Trump administration.

It's not just the Episcopal Church that is supporting the needs of refugees and immigrants. The Just North United Church of Christ in Columbus, OH, currently houses a young Honduran couple, their toddler, and their 20-day-old baby. The baby was delivered in an Arizona hospital shortly after crossing the border, while his father and sibling were in a detention facility.

The Life.Church in Oklahoma is helping keep families together in another way. They initially launched a major foster care initiative in 2016 and hope to step up their efforts to raise awareness about the need for foster care families in Oklahoma. "We believe local churches can and should make a difference in our communities, so we have partnered with organizations that strengthen at-risk families," said Jon Mays, Life.Church's director of local mission partnerships.

For its part, the Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations, based in Washington, D.C., also offers a range of resources for Episcopalians interested in advocating for the church's positions on these issues.

"The Episcopal Church, through General Convention policy, calls for an immediate end to the inhumane practice of family detention, calls for the immediate release of detained asylum seekers ... and upholds the sanctity of the asylum process and urges strong support for the protection of vulnerable individuals."

Here are some Bible verses and a question outline to guide our discussion:

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters -- with absolute purity. (For context, read 5:1-8.)

Mark 10:28-30

"Peter began to say to [Jesus], "Look, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age -- houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions -- and in the age to come eternal life." (For context, read Mark 10:17-31.)

1 Peter 2:13-17

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Acts 5:27-29

When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

Prayer for Guidance (BCP p.832)

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what *you would* have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in *your* light we may see light, and in *your* straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.