

UNITED METHODIST WOMEN

Campaign to End Family Detention

In 2014, thousands of children, alone or with families, crossed the U.S./Mexico border seeking safety in the United States. They fled extreme violence and poverty in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. They faced abuse and violence as they crossed Mexico. In the United States the migration gained national attention and became politicized by electoral politics. In response to the increased numbers of immigrants crossing the border, the U.S. government stepped up the enforcement of immigration laws, detention and deportation. United Methodists responded with an outpouring of love, care and support. These immigrant children and families are indeed the faces of Jesus Christ in our midst. Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me," (Matthew 25:40) and United Methodists are living out that call, serving as the hands and feet of Jesus. *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2012* states, "We are urged by God through Christ to love our neighbor and to do what we must to bring healing in the midst of pain, and to restore to wholeness those whose lives are shattered by injustice and oppression." (Resolution 6072, *The Book of Resolutions*. Copyright © 2012 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. United States-Mexico Border, www.umc.org/what-we-believe/united-states-mexico-border)

United Methodist Women National Office invites you to learn more about this situation and join the **Campaign to End Family Detention**. Violating both national and international law, the detention of families criminalizes women and children who should have refugee status or a temporary protected status due to the dangers in their home countries; and it exposes them to fear, isolation, further hardship and abuse. The detention centers must be closed, not expanded. We also challenge the use of electronic ankle bracelet monitors as an alternative to detention. These are physically painful, take hours a day to charge and stigmatize immigrant women, making it difficult to obtain services and jobs. Asylum seekers should be offered bond and legal assistance, not detention or shackling.



United
Methodist
Women

FAITH • HOPE • LOVE IN ACTION

ACTION:

Here's how you can participate in the Campaign to End Family Detention:

1. Host a house party or church gathering to screen the 30-minute video by Grassroots Leadership, **No Sanctuary: Big Business and Family Detention**. You can get a free copy of the DVD if you agree to host a gathering. To obtain your copy, contact Linda Viney, Iviney@unitedmethodistwomen.org. Let us know where and when you plan to screen the video.
2. At the video screening, use the accompanying study guide to host a discussion about family detention and what you can do.
3. In preparation for the event, view the video, review the questions in the study guide and be prepared to address or refer questions that come up. You can contact Carol Barton in United Methodist Women National Office with any questions.
4. Let your members in Congress and the White House know that we need to end family detention. You might want to have the following available as a handout for your group or send letters or postcards together.
 - Find your senators' names and phone numbers at: (www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm).
 - Find your representative's name at: www.house.gov/representatives/find and call (202) 224-3121.
 - Prepare a statement for your congressional representative. Here's an example:
My name is _____ calling from _____. I am a member of United Methodist Women. As a constituent, I oppose immigrant family detention. Central American families held in DHS custody are seeking protection from violence, trafficking and domestic violence. Children require specialized medical, educational and legal support that detention facilities cannot provide. The Obama administration has rapidly expanded family detention since June 2014. Their stated goal is to deter future migration to the United States, which, they argue, would pose a national security threat. I hope you will publicly speak out against family detention, oppose funding for these facilities and contact the White House to express your alarm over this practice. I want to see Karnes, Texas; Dilley, Texas; and all other family detention centers closed.
 - Contact the White House to raise your concerns. Phone: 202-456-1111; for information to email or write: www.whitehouse.gov/contact/write-or-call.
5. Contact United Methodist Women National Office about opportunities for public witness and direct service regarding family detention.

For more information contact: Carol Barton, United Methodist Women Immigrant & Civil Rights Initiative, 777 United Nations Plaza, 11th floor, New York, NY 10017; cbarton@unitedmethodistwomen.org; 212-682-3633.

Family Detention Background:

Thousands of **Central American families** as well as unaccompanied children have been crossing the U.S./Mexico border seeking refuge. Most turn themselves in to border patrol agents when they arrive and request asylum. Before this migrant flow made national news in 2014, many families were being processed and released to join family members across the U.S. while they waited for their immigration hearing date.

Once the refugee flow became a political football in July 2014 and the administration was accused of allowing “porous borders,” there was a marked increase of criminalizing Central American refugees. Many women with children have been detained without bond, even after passing the first step of the asylum process. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) stated goal is to punish these women and children in order to deter future migration to the United States, which, they argue, would pose a national security threat. In the summer of 2014 the federal government reinstated family detention centers on a mass scale. By summer of 2015, it will be operating two massive facilities in Karnes, Texas (1,100 beds) and Dilley, Texas (2,400 beds). GEO manages Karnes and CCA manages Dilley. Both are private prison companies working on behalf of DHS.

According to the White House, *“We are urging government enforcement resources to increase our capacity to detain individuals and adults who bring their children with them and to handle immigration court hearings...as quickly and efficiently as possible while also protecting those who are seeking asylum. That will allow ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) to return unlawful migrants from Central America to their home countries more quickly...”* (www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/20/fact-sheet-unaccompanied-children-central-america). But most asylum seekers without legal counsel are being deported. Several have been killed on their return.

In February 2015 a U.S. District Court argued that ICE cannot detain a whole class of people in order to deter future migration. While the government has appealed this decision and the case will have to proceed through the courts, this initial ruling was a blow to the unjust rationale offered by the U.S. government for the detention of Central American families seeking protection in the United States, and is the first step toward righting this broken practice. Meanwhile, family detention continues on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, many women across the country who *do* join family members are forced to wear electronic ankle bracelet monitors. Evidence shows that immigrants released on bond with legal support overwhelmingly report for their hearings (Women's Refugee Commission). They should not be incarcerated or penalized with electronic monitors.

RESOURCES:

“The Shame of America's Family Detention Camps,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/02/08/magazine/the-shame-of-americas-family-detention-camps.html?_r=0

“For-Profit Family Detention: Meet the Private Prison Companies Making Millions by Locking Up Refugee Families,” Grassroots Leadership with Justice Strategies, October 2014, grassrootsleadership.org/reports/profit-family-detention-meet-private-prison-corporations-making-millions-locking-refugee.

“Seeking Asylum in Karnes City,” *The Texas Observer*, February 2, 2015, www.texasobserver.org/seeking-asylum-karnes-city. “Deported from the Middle of Nowhere,” *The New York Times* editorial, August 25, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/08/26/opinion/at-an-immigrant-detention-center-due-process-denied..html?_r=0.