United Methodist Women partners with the Detention Watch Network (DWN) to resource local involvement in detention visitation. DWN has created a network of groups visiting detention centers and a manual for starting an ecumenical program. They are ready to assist you.

In the Wesleyan tradition of visiting those in prison, you can offer friendship to migrants who are in detention. Friendship that affirms humanity in the midst of a dehumanizing scenario and provides emotional support to some of the world’s most vulnerable people is one of detained immigrants most important needs. Your visits will provide hope to individuals. They also will empower your witness as an advocate for improved treatment of detained immigrants and especially for alternatives to detention. (Information from www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/node/2642.)

The detention of immigrants is the fastest growing prison industry in the United States. The U.S. government detained approximately 380,000 people in immigration custody in 2009 in about 350 facilities at an annual cost of more than $1.7 billion. Immigrants in detention include families, undocumented and documented immigrants (many who have been in the United States for years), survivors of torture, asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups including pregnant women, children and individuals who are seriously ill and kept from proper medication or care. The number of immigrants in detention has grown under the Obama Administration, which also seeks to build new detention centers.

Being in violation of immigration laws is not a crime; it is a civil violation for which immigrants go through a process to see whether they have a right to stay in the United States. Immigrants detained during this process are in noncriminal custody. About half of all immigrants held in detention have no criminal record at all. Some may have committed some crime in their past but have already paid their debt to society. They are being detained for immigration purposes only. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the agency responsible for detaining immigrants. Although DHS owns and operates its own detention centers, it also “buys” bed space from county and city prisons nationwide to hold the majority of those who are detained. Immigrants detained in these local jails are mixed in with the local prison population that is serving time for crimes. (See www.detentionwatchnetwork.org.)

The United Methodist Church calls for an end to detention and deportation until there is just immigration reform that offers migrants a pathway to citizenship. Despite intense efforts by the faith community and many other groups, Congress has repeatedly failed to pass such reform. Meanwhile, the DHS has intensified programs to detain migrants through ICE ACCESS agreements with local police forces (such as 287G and Secure Communities). Migrant detainees do not have the right to court-appointed attorneys or other aspects of due process. Migrants who have committed minor crimes are subject to mandatory detention even when they pose no threat, which means separation from families and loss of breadwinners.

**HOW TO... Visit Migrants in DETENTION in Your Community**

*find out what YOU can do!*
To learn more about how to begin or join a detention visitation program, contact Deaconess Cindy Johnson, United Methodist Women Yim Intern on Immigration, at CJohnson@unitedmethodistwomen.org.

For a map of detention centers across the United States, visit: www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/dwnmap

For a list of sites that already have detention visitation programs that you can join, visit: www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/visitationlistusprograms


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