

Statement of Interfaith Leaders of Northeastern Ohio on Immigration and Refugee Issues

As interfaith leaders, we stand firmly and faithfully in the belief that each human being is to be accorded the dignity of a creature of God. It is God to whom we owe our ultimate existence and dignity. We also believe human beings constitute one human family which demands we speak out and for all humans who have been created in the image of God. These beliefs transcend all political and cultural realities.

We, interfaith leaders of northeastern Ohio, join together to promote immigration and refugee policies that embrace and welcome newcomers into our communities and promote their human rights and dignity. This is done with due respect for the fact that we are a nation that values the rule of law.

We are troubled by the rhetoric against immigrants and refugees being used by some of our elected officials, which dehumanizes them and subjects them to abusive behavior. This rhetoric has created a toxic political and social environment which tends to blame immigrants and refugees for our social ills, despite the truth that immigrants have been a positive force for the improvement of our nation, state and localities, as well as having a lower crime rate than the general population. We urge members of our congregations to resist this rhetoric and to show solidarity and generosity to those who come to our country in search of safety and opportunity.

We oppose the immigration and refugee policies being promulgated by federal authorities which seek to promote enforcement as the only possible solution to our broken immigration system. We also oppose efforts to weaken our asylum and refugee protection systems, as well as policies which discriminate against immigrants and refugees because of their faith affiliation. Congress also must pass, and the president sign, legislation which creates a path to citizenship for undocumented youth brought to this country at an early age and who have proven to be both industrious and productive.

We are particularly concerned with federal enforcement raids in Ohio which have injected fear in local immigrant communities and divided immigrant families. While enforcement is an important part of a functioning and just immigration system, it should not be used as a mechanism to sow fear and intimidation or to separate parents from their children. Law enforcement should focus primarily on those who are a threat to us, not to law-abiding long-term residents who have built equities in our nation over a period of time.

The most viable solution to our broken immigration system is to address the root causes of migration from neighboring nations in Central America. Because of violence, conflict and extreme poverty many feel that migration is the only way they can live in safety and support their families in dignity.

Policies of deterrence, including the cruel practice of separating children from their parents, are ineffective and place immigrant families in more danger. We also must fix our broken immigration system through just, compassionate and humane immigration reform legislation.

We will work together to achieve these goals and to educate our congregations on the issue of immigration from our faith perspectives. We are united in the view that all migrants, regardless of their national origin, ethnicity, race, religion, or legal status are endowed with God-given rights which should be protected and should not be subject to abuse or exploitation. We strongly believe that our great country can create an immigration system which is fair, honors the rule of law, and upholds human rights and dignity.

The undersigned have given their names in public support of this statement:

The Most Rev. Nelson Perez
Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Cleveland

The Rev. Abraham Allende
Bishop, Northeast Ohio Synod
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The Rt. Rev. Mark Hollingsworth Jr.
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Prof. Zeki Saritoprak,
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The Rev. Gary Halstead
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The Rev. Sharon Core
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V. Rev. Fr. Alexander Garklavs
Holy Trinity Orthodox Church
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