Interfaith Weekend of Compassion and Prayer for Unaccompanied Migrant Children

Resource Packet

July 18-20, 2014

CALPACUMC.ORG/INTERFAITHWEEKEND
July 11, 2014

Dear colleagues and friends,

We know that many of you join us in being concerned about the urgent humanitarian need at our border and in our communities as thousands of refugee children flee violence and instability, seeking a safe haven here in the U.S.

Photos of overcrowded facilities and political grandstanding on the issue have captivated the media, but the national conversation has yet to reflect our faith values and our commitment to compassion and caring for children. Too many of these children are scared and alone, desperate for someone to accompany them and care for them as they seek a future that will be brighter than their past.

We hope you will join us for an Interfaith Weekend of Compassion and Prayer for Unaccompanied Migrant Children, July 18-20, from sunset to sunset.

This coming Monday, July 14, we will have a resource packet ready for you online that will include worship guides in the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim tradition that you can draw from for language for liturgies, prayers, bulletin inserts or announcements, as we join together in prayer for these refugee children and their families. We will also send along materials that speak to the plight of these children.

During this interfaith weekend of compassion and prayer, we hope you and your community of faith will also join us in a letter-writing campaign to inject a much-needed dose of compassion into the national conversation and to send a message to these children that they are not forgotten.

Writing letters to the migrant children can be a great activity for small groups, Sunday School classes, coffee hours, Vacation Bible Schools, and for individual parishioners to work on from their homes and with their families. The website www.TheyareChildren.com will go live on Monday, July 14th with additional information on submitting your own letter, drawing, or photo to a child and holding them in prayer.

We are also inviting you to be ready to join us in reaching out to congressional leaders and calling upon them to rise above politics and respond to this humanitarian crisis with compassion and respect for the rights of these vulnerable ones in our midst. The resource packet will include information to help us do so.

I hope you’ll join us in sending love and support to these children in need and helping us to move away from a polarized and hostile narrative to a narrative of compassion and justice that reflects our faith values.

Blessings

Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño  
Los Angeles Area Resident Bishop  
The United Methodist Church

Bishop J. Jon Bruno  
Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles  
President, Los Angeles Council of Religious Leaders
Faith Communities To Hold July 18-20, 2014 Interfaith Weekend of Compassion and Prayer for Refugee Children at the Border

Next weekend, July 18-20, 2014 hundreds of people of faith—Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic congregations and houses of worship—will gather in prayer to express their compassion and support for refugee children at the border. These vulnerable children came to the U.S. fleeing violence in Central America and are being housed in detention centers, facilities on military bases, and other temporary shelters.

On Tuesday, July 8, 2014 United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño and Episcopal Bishop John Bruno visited Naval Base Ventura County, a site where over 500 children are being held in California. After touring the facility, these two religious leaders in California extended an invitation to congregations in the state and nationwide to join the Interfaith Weekend of Compassion and Prayer.

“These are children, and as people of faith and justice, we cannot just turn a blind eye or turn them away,” said Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the United Methodist Church in Los Angeles, Calif. “These migrant children are God’s children and therefore our youngest and most vulnerable brothers and sisters for whom we must care.”

People of faith are also sending messages of compassion via written letters and notes, which you can read at www.TheyAreChildren.com, a new site launched Monday, July 14, 2014.

Religious communities are also calling their Members of Congress to urge adequate funding for refugee resettlement and legal representation for refugee children.

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Interfaith Call to Compassion and Prayer for the Unaccompanied Migrant Children
Worship Resource from a Muslim Perspective
July 18-20, 2014
Shakeel Syed, Executive Director of the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California

Friday Sermon (Khutba) on the Plight of Fleeing Children from Central America

Children are the priceless gifts that the Most Compassionate God Almighty has bestowed upon us. We measure this gift by virtue of our dedication toward them. Undoubtedly, if not the only occasion, it may be one of the very few occasions, when a parent would trade him-self or her-self to protect his/her child. Such is the innate love our Lord has created within us for our children.

And hence our grateful response for the awesome gift of children & grandchildren should be:

1. Our unconditional gratefulness to God Almighty for His awesome gift of children,
2. Our absolute commitment to embrace these gifts & protect & shelter them,
3. Be a source of comfort and means for their needs,
4. Help them realize their full potential, and
5. Most importantly, make our lives revolve around their well being even at self discomfort.

Most regrettably it seems that we are denying ourselves the opportunity to do all of the above. We also seem to be living in a society that seems to have misplaced our priorities, nearly completely. Children have now become the last and not the first priority of our society.

Instead of embracing the children with love and compassion some American communities are picketing and protesting against them. Many of them may not realize that it is our nation who is at least partially responsible for creating harsh conditions in the neighboring lands forcing their populations to emigrate to ours. As someone said it well that because “we (America) are in their lands, they (Central America) are forced to come to ours.”

As people of faith and conscience, our perspective must be God rooted. We know all too well that God does not create anyone with papers. We do. God does not make people legal and illegal. We do. God
does not see one people better over the other, except those who feed the hungry, clothe the poor and shelter the visitor and the wanderer.

The Most Compassionate God is asking us to find and celebrate “joy & contentment” in our children and not subject them with our hate and anger.

God does not measure our piety and righteousness by virtue of our rituals or glorifying Him but rather how well we take care of the most vulnerable of our society.

Those who are entrusted with some temporal power to govern the society have miserably failed us. While we lament their failings, we must do our part. This is the season of compassion and mercy. We must act out our compassion and mercy by reaching out to the children housed in various detention centers and also remind those whom we have elected that they have a responsibility and that we demand them to be responsible in best representing us.

As a nation we spend hundreds of billions of dollars causing death & destruction in far away places, but do not have meager resources to provide shelter, healthcare and education to “all” of our children.

Sadly, our President now asks for additional $3.7 billion dollars to “strengthen border security.” Instead, I ask our President to dedicate at least 3.7 minutes to kneel down to “redeem himself and the nation” by asking the Creator for forgiveness. He and his fellow politicians across all aisles must be ashamed for using human beings as pawns of their politics. And we as people of faith and conscience stand as a witness against these professional perpetrators of injustice.

As people of faith & conscience, we ought to uphold the Quranic injunction that it is He, who “grants equal dignity and all the honor to every child of Adam” – not just some or not only those with papers or without. It is incumbent upon us to stand up for what is right and what is just. For Quran teaches us this:

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin and whether it be against rich or poor: For Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve, and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well acquainted with all that you do. (4:135)
I ask you to join me and our fellow brothers and sisters from all faiths and traditions to make this week a week of compassion and justice.

Let us remember that it is most noble to give before we are asked for it …
Let us remember that our gratefulness to God’s awesome gifts is to protect them ..
Let us remember that children are a mighty & priceless blessing to us and not a curse ..
Let us remember as parents & guardians of our imperative to be a source of comfort to them ..
Let us remember that we’ll be remembered by our care & concern for the voiceless
Let us remember that our joy is in giving rather than in receiving

Let us remember that in God, we seek refuge and find strength in reclaiming and restoring the lost rights of His most awesome creation and gift to us - our children

Shura Council has joined many faith groups in asking our legislators to embrace a law that restores the dignity and honor of all men and women and indeed all children.

Let us together engage in this noble struggle to defend those who are defenseless, to give voice to those who are voiceless and to be a reason of smile and joys to those who are full of tears and without hope – their voiceless cries must be heard because in it is our salvation and in them is our present & future! Amen.
As thousands upon thousands of unaccompanied children find themselves beginning their early years as refugees trying desperately to settle into the safety that most of us take for granted, we are called to reflect on the inherent value and infinite worth that they, created in the Divine Image, carry with them across blistering hot desert lands, ill-equipped to survive. Rather than nourished with silver spoons in their mouths, these children are frequently dragged by unscrupulous coyotes across borders, thieves driven by greed and hardened by failed attempts to cross to safety, resulting in capture and an uncertain fate at best, death alone in the desert their frequent demise. Unlike so many of our ancestors, who came on boats to Ellis Island a century ago—not as stowaways but as bona fide passengers—these unaccompanied children are arriving at our nation’s doors by foot. They come, leaving behind their heartbroken—and broke—parents who remain in impoverished and oftentimes war-torn lands, where shoes are a luxury and fear their underlying feeling. They set out on foot or boat seeing no other choice. How will we respond?

Litany for Compassion for Immigrants
Reader: In the early 1900s, droves of East European immigrants came to the United States. Very quickly, these Ostjuden outnumbered the earlier generation of German Jewish immigrants who had settled into this land of opportunity. Within a generation, they established roots, anchored in the American Dream. Our grandparents and great grandparents came to this nation with few barriers, met by the Statue of Liberty proclaiming their freedom.

Congregation: We are taught, “Love the Stranger, for You were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Dt 10:19). How will we respond to strangers?

Reader: In May of 1939, the SS St. Louis set sail from Hamburg with 937 Jewish refugees fleeing from the flames of Europe. The celebratory journey across the sea soon turned to anguish when at Cuba’s shore, Havana refused to accept them. Turning to Florida, the ship’s captain was met with warning shots to leave. With no other options available, the ship set sail once again, back to Europe, where a quarter of them would soon perish in Concentration Camps.

Congregation: We are taught, “Love the Stranger, for You were strangers in the land of Egypt.” How will we respond to strangers?

Reader: In the late seventies, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese families found themselves fleeing their decimated homeland and heading out on the high seas. Many attempted to resettle in Southeast Asia, but plenty made their way to the United States. Many of our congregations adopted Vietnamese “Boat People” families, helping them resettle in our land of plenty, our own immigrant grandparents reminding us of our own similar story.

Congregation: We are taught, “Love the Stranger, for You were strangers in the land of Egypt.” How will we respond to strangers?

Reader: By the eighties, military juntas and poverty led thousands of Central Americans toward our borders, the ugly face of anti-Immigrant bigotry trying to block their entry. Many synagogues once again opened their doors, some adopting entire families as part of the Sanctuary Movement. These families were given a pathway to citizenship when President
Reagan and Congress established an Amnesty program, and our nation once again embraced its immigrant history.

Congregation: We are taught, “Love the Stranger, for You were strangers in the land of Egypt.” How will we respond to strangers?

Reader: Today, the ongoing suffering of people south of our border has been made painfully clear, as images of unaccompanied minors flood our inboxes and force us to reckon with a crisis that will not go away without love for the victims, compassion for their families. Like us, the children of immigrants, these children are our nation’s future.

Congregation: We are taught, “Love the Stranger, for You were strangers in the land of Egypt.” How will we respond to strangers?

Reader: Let us welcome these children as our own, hearkening back to the words of the great Jewish poet, Emma Lazarus, whose elegant words adorn the Statue Liberty:

**Collective Prayer**

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” Abraham and Sarah, our ancestors, welcomed wayfarers into their tents. On Passover, we open our doors and proclaim, “Let all who are hungry, come and eat!” On Sukkot, we welcome guests into our Sukkah. Let us, too, welcome these children, with love in our hearts, responding to the Torah’s call to affirm their inherent worth, and elevating the lessons learned by our people to welcome guests into our homes after centuries of wandering. “We shall do, and we shall hearken!” Blessed are You, Master of the Universe, who Welcomes the Stranger.

**Sources**

The Talmud states that “childhood is a garland of roses” and that “the very breath of children is free of sin.” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 152, 119).

“And you shall teach them (Commandments) to your children ... in order that you may lengthen your days and your children’s days upon the earth.” (Dt 11:18).

“Children are an inheritance from HaShem” (Ps. 127:3).

“When the Children of Israel stood at Mount Sinai to receive Torah, the Holy One of Blessing said to them: ‘Bring me good guarantors that you will keep my Torah and then I will give it to you.’ They replied: ‘Sovereign of the Universe, our ancestors will be our guarantors.’ Said God to them: ‘Your guarantors need guarantors themselves, for they have not been without fault.’ They answered, ‘Our prophets will be our guarantors.’ God replied: ‘They have also not been without fault.’ Then the Israelites said: ‘Our children will be our guarantors.’ To which God replied: ‘In truth these are good guarantors. For their sake I will give it to you.’” (Shir HaShirim Raba 1:4)

“A person must be especially heedful of his/her behavior toward widows and orphans, for their souls are exceedingly depressed and their spirits low. Even if they are wealthy, even if they are the widow and orphans of a king, we are especially enjoined concerning them, as it
is written: “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan.” (Exodus 22 v.21) How are we to conduct ourselves toward them? One may not speak to them other than in a tender manner. One must show them courtesy; one must not hurt them physically with hard toil, nor wound their feelings with hard speech. One must take greater care of their property than of one’s own. Whoever irritates them, provokes them to anger, pains them, persecutes them, or causes them loss of money, is guilty of serious transgression, and all the more so if one beats them. The One Who created the world through Words made a covenant with widows and orphans that when they cry out because of violence, they are answered; as it is written: “Beware of afflicting them in any way, for if they cry at all unto Me I will surely hear their cry!” (Ex 22:22). (Maimonides, Hilchot Deot 6 : 10)
On this day thousands of unaccompanied migrant children are crossing borders and much hazard in search of safe haven. From toddlers to teenagers they are escaping the violence of gangs, drug cartels, and death due to extreme poverty caused by natural disasters over the years and by a deadly consumerism imbedded in regional and global economic decisions beyond their control. These children are leaving their homelands, not out of a desire for wealth, but for life. Many of them have been sent forth to migrate by their anguished mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, to save their lives. They are now at our southern border and in many of our communities. How we receive them will determine whether our witness bears or fails to bear the heart of Jesus who said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”Matthew 19:14b. Let us pray for these children and for ourselves that God may bless these migrant children and bless us with courage to extend tender and compassionate care and love to them.

Litany for Compassion

Leader: Oh God of infinite mercy and grace, hear our prayers as we pray for the unaccompanied migrant children among us.

People: Extend your tender care to these children, oh God, making of us your agents of compassion and love to them.

Leader: Remove from our hearts any obstacle that does not allow us to see them as the precious children you have created.

People: Be merciful towards us for our failures to respond to these unaccompanied migrant children in the way that Jesus once did, receiving them and embracing them and declaring that the children are the inheritors of your kingdom.

Leader: Place within us a burning love for these migrant children and all children, that we may give witness to them of the world of justice and peace that you hope for, for all your children.

People: Remind us that in your eyes there are no borders, only a great big world of your children whom you love without exception.

Collective Prayer
Hear our prayer, oh loving and compassionate God, and give us courage that we may accompany these migrant children with abundant mercy and grace. Embolden us to speak to the world of your love for all your children, and give us the courage to be unafraid. Free us from the fear of scarcity and the fear of the one whom we do not know. Through the power and presence of your Holy Spirit remind us that we are all your children, and allow us the blessing of experiencing the renewal of life that comes when we share your love with especially the littlest among us. Bring your healing among these unaccompanied migrant children. Bless their hearts with your loving presence, and surround them with your angels of care. Bless their parents and their families wherever they may be as they suffer the separation and the not knowing that comes with the migrant journey. Bless us to be the parents, family and friends of these children who now come to be among us, blessing us and bringing us your love. Amen.

Suggested Scriptural Texts


Hymns and Songs of Compassion and Prayer

“Jesus Hands Were Kind Hands” - Margaret Cropper
“I Want Jesus to Walk with Me” - Afro-American Spiritual
“Lord whose Love Through Humble Service” - Albert F. Bayly
“Children of the Heavenly Father” - Caroline V. Sandbell-Berg, Trans. Ernst W. Olson
“We Meet You O Christ” - Fred Kaan
“Niño Lindo” - Trad. Venezuelan
“Cuando El Pobre” - J.A. Oliver & Miguel Manzano
“Like a Child” - Daniel Charles Damon
“Nothing Can Trouble (“Nada Te Turbe”)” - St Teresa de Jesús; Taizé Community
“A Mother Lined a Basket” - Mary Nelson Keithahn
“Outcast among Outcasts” - Richard D. Leach
“The Servant Song” - Richard Gillard

“Welcome” - Laurie Zelman and Mark Miller

“Put Your Arms around the World” - Joan Reppert

“Walls that Divide” - Walter Farquharson & Ron Klusmeier

“The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me” - Jim Strathdee

“All Are Welcome” - Marty Haugen
TheyAreChildren.com: Sending Messages of Compassion to Refugee Children

What’s happening?
Gang violence and drug trafficking are skyrocketing in Central America and children and youth are fleeing for their lives, escaping desperate situations in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala and seeking refuge in the U.S. Temporary facilities are straining to house all the children and there’s a desperate need for legal representation, emotional support, and foster families, among many other issues.

These children have traveled a great distance and survived a harrowing journey and are too often, scared and alone. Together, we can send them our compassion and prayers, reminding them that they are not alone or forgotten.

What can you do?
Go to www.TheyAreChildren.com to read letters to the brave refugee children and write or upload your own letter to the site, sending messages of compassion and hope to these children who have overcome so many hardships to come to the U.S.

You can also take photos of your letters or share other messages or videos online (via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), using the hashtag #TheyAreChildren.

Who can take part?
This is a great way for Sunday school and Vacation Bible School classes, social justice committees, youth groups, and congregations to live out God’s call to welcome the stranger and care for the least among us. You can write letters together, submitting many individual letters or one message as a class or group.

Share the website (www.TheyAreChildren.com) with your friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers, inviting others to take part and share their own message of compassion.

What happens next?
Letters and notes are being shared through www.TheyAreChildren.com and will be shared through traditional and social media, as we work together to change the conversation and refocus on these vulnerable and an urgent humanitarian situation unfolding on our border.

We will print and translate as many letters as possible to bring to future visits to or tours of facilities housing refugee children and to share with organizations and churches working directly with refugee children as well.
URGENT: CALL THE SENATE & HOUSE TODAY!
Demand that Congress REJECT Rollbacks to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act

Proposals to "deport children more quickly" would return unaccompanied children to exploitation, trafficking and unsafe situations

As the U.S. government responds to the humanitarian crisis faced by unaccompanied children and families fleeing violence in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, both President Obama and some Members of Congress are proposing changes to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008. The TVPRA passed both chambers of Congress by unanimous consent and was signed into law by President Bush to address our international obligations of not returning vulnerable migrants to danger and to reduce the likelihood that the U.S. would deport children back into the hands of traffickers and others who would exploit them.

Changes to the TVPRA would mean that children would not have a meaningful opportunity to have their story heard, apply for asylum, or be cared for humanely by child welfare personnel, and would be deported to potentially life-threatening situations. Congress should not rescind this bipartisan law at precisely the time when more children are in need of these protections. The U.S. must show leadership by finding ways to reduce the violence these children face in their home countries, rather than immoral proposals to deport them more quickly. More than 4,000 people of faith have already urged Congress and the Administration to uphold these protections in a letter delivered to Congress and Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson.

This heartbreaking story, shared by a partner of a Jesuit social center in Honduras is one of many that shows why these children need access to protection: After “Leticia” was raped by over a dozen gang members, she and her family reported the crime to the police. They immediately began to receive death threats. In the absence of any protection, and likely complicity by police in the gang’s terror campaign, the local partner attempted to relocate Leticia to a women’s shelter. The shelter refused to take the case because of fear that they would not be able to protect either Leticia or their other beneficiaries from the gang. In the end to protect Leticia from further harm, she had to be sent to another country.

Call 1-866-940-2439 to be connected with the offices of your Representative and both of your Senators.

You can also go to bit.ly/TheyAreChildren to call directly.

Here’s a sample script: "I’m from State, Congregation/Community and as a person of faith, I strongly oppose any rollbacks to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Unaccompanied children fleeing violence should not be returned to unsafe situations, but must be protected and cared for humanely. As your constituent, I expect you to stand firm against any proposal that would sacrifice a child’s safety for expediency. The U.S. must instead find ways to reduce the violence these children face in their home countries and ensure that children who arrive to the U.S. have access to the legal counsel and services they need."

Keep up the pressure on social media!
Go to bit.ly/TheyAreChildren to urge Congress to oppose proposals that would hurt unaccompanied children: Ex: @SpeakerBoehner As a person of faith I urge you to oppose TVPRA changes that would deport kids to unsafe situations #TheyAreChildren #UACs (Note: the first period “.” is important)

Follow @InterfaithImm on Twitter and “like” Interfaith Immigration Coalition on Facebook for up-to-date alerts.
Interfaith Call to Compassion and Prayer for Unaccompanied Migrant Children

RESOURCE SHEET

Background on what is happening in Central America

- American Immigration Council report, "No Childhood Here: Why Central American Children are Fleeing their Homes," https://docs.google.com/a/alliancesd.org/document/d/1YnLixUNgTTEj8CT17y4H8acVxOC05_nNP29zS9suAXnc/edit
- RAICES (Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services), www.raicestexas.org

Statements of Concerned Organizations

- United Methodist General Board of Church and Society: http://umc-gbcs.org/press-releases/social-justice-agency-skeptical-of-obama-actions-on-unaccompanied-chil
- CWS (Church World Service) Statement: cwsglobal.org/uac
- Action alert on UACs and ORR funding: rcusa.org, with a shorter version at bitly.com/stop-cut
- Faith leader press teleconference audio: www.dropbox.com/s/hl5lkr6y8mqbuo9/CHILDREN%20071014.mp3
- National faith petition: http://bitly.com/uac-faith-petition
- AILA resources on unaccompanied children: www.aila.org/uac, specifically about the President’s supplemental request: www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?docid=49223

How You Can Help

Nationwide
- Episcopal Relief and Development: https://www.episcopalrelief.org/

In California
- Donate to San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium (SDIRC): http://www.immigrantsandiego.org
- Donate through the Roman Catholic diocese of San Bernardino: www.sbdioce.se.org
- Donate items for children held at Port Hueneme Naval Base through: Center for Employment Training-Oxnard, 761 South C. St. Oxnard CA. 93030, 805-487-9821
- Learn more about what is happening in California here: http://immigrantsandiego.org/2014/07/03/sdirc-assist-central-american-refugees/

In Arizona
- Donate to Border Action Network: http://www.borderaction.org

**In New Mexico**

• Donate to the Catholic Diocese Las Cruces Diocese’s Project Oak Tree: [http://www.dioceseoflascruces.org/assets/ot_fly.pdf](http://www.dioceseoflascruces.org/assets/ot_fly.pdf)

**In Texas**

• In El Paso, donate to the Annunciation House: [http://annunciationhouse.org/2014/07/03/what-can-you-do/](http://annunciationhouse.org/2014/07/03/what-can-you-do/)
• Learn more about what is happening in Texas here: [https://alongsideaborder.wordpress.com/2014/07/07/children-at-the-gate](https://alongsideaborder.wordpress.com/2014/07/07/children-at-the-gate)
Interfaith Call to Compassion and Prayer for Unaccompanied Migrant Children

CONTACT SHEET

How are you responding to the call?

Please share with us your contact information so that we all can keep in touch as an interfaith community of care and compassion.

Complete the form below and mail to:

California-Pacific Conference of The United Methodist Church
Office of Communications
PO Box 6006
Pasadena, CA 91102-6006

Name: 
Organization: 
Email Address: 
How did you hear about the interfaith call?
Mailing Address: 
Phone Number: