

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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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 Unaccompanied Migrant Children
July 18 – 20, 2014
Worship Resources from a Christian Perspective
Prepared by Rev. Dr. Laurie A. Kraus, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance

The bible invites God's people to pray without ceasing. In the past several weeks, the deepening of crises throughout the world—on the U.S. Border, in Gaza, Syria, Iraq, the Ukraine and South Sudan, to name but a few—has made that advice not figurative, but imperative. What else can we do but pray, with broken hearts and eyes filled with tears, as we witness the fear and suffering of so many of your beloved children? We are aware that our denominational leaders have called the Presbyterian family to prayer not once, but many times in these past days, as we have wept over the plight of refugee children, watched the continuing violence throughout the Middle East, and struggled to find appropriate voice and action to be Christ's healing presence in the midst of chaos.

This weekend, we invite you again to be in prayer not only with the Presbyterian family, but with the whole interfaith community, as we lift up the plight of children and families who have fled violence in their home countries and who are detained at our southern borders hoping for welcome, shelter, and safety. We invite you to join with other people of faith in praying for detained children, the communities and places of worship who attempt to provide comfort and hospitality in constrained circumstances, for our leaders as Congress and the President determine a path forward, and for those governmental and non-governmental agencies tasked with the children's security and safety.

Jesus said, let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. (Luke 18:16)

Please pray with us, and with faith communities throughout our land.

Prayer

God of refuge, Holy One of blessing:

With tender care for the smallest and least of your children,
you bid disciples: let the children come, and do not forbid them.

You reminded your followers that the kingdom of God is formed

and filled with "such as these," and so we ask you to help us see them as You do:

these little ones who flee gang violence in cities throughout Central America.

these vulnerable ones and their families,

who cannot find food to sustain or a safe place to take shelter.

these mothers and fathers, who have impoverished their own hope

in order to save their children's future.

these, your little ones, who cry out to be covered by Your sheltering wings,

and who seek to see Your face in the faces of those who meet them

in the strange lands of exile.

We pray for grace and courage as we seek to live up to our nation's heritage as a haven for the tired and poor, and huddled masses yearning to breathe free.

We pray for generosity and creativity as we work with church and state to find places of grace, safety, and hope for children and families who are refugees.

We pray for all who would help: for communities of welcome, for volunteers and visitors, for chaplains, social workers, judges and health care workers who tend to the needs of frightened children and seek to balance urgent necessity with strained resources.

We pray for a peaceful spirit as we work and serve among neighbors whose fearfulness prevents generosity from flowering in human hearts.

O Child of Galilee, you who once, long ago
fled the violence of Herod,
received the generosity of strangers
found refuge with your family in a strange land
and returned home to show us the way:

once again, even now, in this hour of need:
show us the way of hospitality
fill us with your love
and bless all your children, whose home is in you,
with gratitude, true community, and grace. Amen.

Hymn

The Children Come

FINLANDIA 11.10.11.10.11.10 (“This Is My Song”)

The children come, not sure where they are going;
Some little ones have seen their siblings die.
They’ve traveled north—a tide that keeps on growing,
A stream of life beneath the desert sky.
Their welcome here? Detention, overflowing.
O Lord of love, now hear your children’s cry!

The children come in search of something better;
They’ve traveled here with nothing in their hands.
On one boy’s belt, a number carved in leather
Leads to a phone, a brother here, a plan.
They come alone—or sometimes band together;
They bring a plea that we will understand.

O Christ our Lord, you welcomed in the stranger;
You blessed the children, telling them to stay.
Be in the desert, with the tired and injured;
Be at the border where they are afraid.
Be on each bus where children sense the danger,
As angry crowds are shouting, “Go away!”

God, let each one know justice, peace and welcome—
And may your gift of mercy start with me.
For unto such as these belongs your kingdom,
And in each child, it is your face we see.
May we, your church, respond in truth and action,
And with you, Lord, say, “Let them come to me.”

Biblical references: Matthew 25:31-46; 19:14-16

Tune: Jean Sibelius, 1899 (“Be Still, My Soul”)

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New Hymns: www.carolynshymns.com Email: bcgillette@comcast.net

Permission is given for free use of this hymn for local church use by those supporting efforts to help these children and immigration reform now.

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

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا
لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا ﴿٧٤﴾ أُولَئِكَ يُجْزَوْنَ الْغُرْفَةَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَيُلَقَّوْنَ فِيهَا

O Lord! Grant us contentment in our spouses and in our children, and help us to be a model among those who are conscious of You.” (25:74)

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:

- Our unconditional gratefulness to God Almighty for His awesome gift of children,
- Our absolute commitment to embrace these gifts & protect & shelter them,
- Be a source of comfort and means for their needs,
- Help them realize their full potential, and
- 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:

وَكَانَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ﴿١٣٤﴾ * يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا
كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ
الْوَالِدِينَ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَاقِرًا فَإِنَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا
الْهَوَىٰ أَن تَعْدِلُوا وَإِن تَلْوُوا أَوْ تُعْرِضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا
تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا ﴿١٣٥﴾ يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ

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.

Interfaith Call to Compassion and Prayer for Unaccompanied Migrant Children
July 18 - July 20, 2014
Worship Resources from a Jewish Perspective
Prepared by Rabbi Jonathan Klein, Executive Director of CLUE-LA

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)