

From Bishop David,

I trust you have seen the images of people walking *en masse* towards the southern US border seeking hope. Personally, I have found these visuals too much to take in, not to mention the horrific manner in which families were stopped at the border with tear gas. Furthermore, I find myself yearning to consider the ways I can be a part of ensuring they are met with hope.

We don't have to peruse terribly far in the narrative of the People of God to find ways in which we are called to acknowledge, to welcome, and to offer care to the refugee, the marginalized, and the displaced. For instance, Deuteronomy 10:17-19 comes to mind:

“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.”

One of the first descriptions of God in scripture is God's love for the foreigner. As People of God, we are also called to love the foreigner as well, and the Great Commandment issued by Jesus is to love God, love our neighbor and ourselves.

I have heard it said that what is occurring at our border is a threat to our American way of life and values. I have heard it said about our sisters and brothers approaching the border that they are criminals and drug dealers and those who are endeavoring to cross into “our land” to do us harm and take our jobs. I have even heard it suggested that what is occurring on our border has little to do with the aforementioned faith narrative and who we are called to be as church; namely, I have heard it expressed that the church should have no voice in this matter.

Sisters and brothers of the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin, as painful and uncomfortable as it is, I need you to see those images on the border and to ensure that they become indelible images. I need you to see our sisters and brothers approaching the border as refugees of God, the Holy displaced, and I need you to pray in the fashion that Pope Francis has suggested that we pray:

We pray for the hungry.

We feed them.

That's how prayer works.

So again, I'm asking that we pray for our sisters and brothers approaching “our border” and one of the manners in which we can live through this praying is to consider practical options.

- 1. Visit the SJRAISE.org website to learn about what local resources our Immigration Task Force is connected to with Faith in the Valley and the ACLU.**
- 2. Please do not send volunteers to the border without people or organizations to receive them. Churches, organizations, and groups are overwhelmed with work and**

are asking that people do not come to the border. They do not have capacity to train, organize, or receive volunteers. There are ways people can help from home.

3. **Help raise money for transit tickets and other needs. Many of the people being released by DHS are heading further north into the United States. Many have family or friends in different cities and states. However, they have NO money to purchase tickets to transit further north. Groups on the ground on the border are organizing to help purchase tickets for people and help them reach their final destinations.**
 - a. **San Diego Rapid Response – Donations <http://www.rapidresponsesd.org/>**
 - b. **Catholic Charities – Travel Assistance Fund <http://sharejourneysd.org/families>**
 - c. **El Paso/Las Cruces Región- Travel Assistance Fund <http://organizenm.org/donations/el-calvario-donation/>**

4. **Offer to welcome and accompany asylum seekers & refugees in your city. Faith in Action has a network of federations, sanctuary congregations, accompaniment teams, and rapid response networks. Asylum seekers and refugees have varying levels of support when they reach their final destination. Welcoming and accompanying people would entail:**
 - a. **A point person of contact to provide to shelters on the border. As people transit to your city, shelters would give the point person’s name and contact information to the person traveling. They would call if they wanted or needed accompaniment and/or support.**
 - b. **The ability to meet asylum seekers, accompany them through their court proceedings, and offer other forms of basic support such as food, clothing, etc.**
 - a. **If your federation would like to welcome and accompany asylum seeker in your city please let Sara know at smelton@faithinaction.org**
 - b. **A trusted list of legal resources in your state that focuses on asylum or refugee services that can be included in each families’ travel packet**

Advent is upon us. This is the season of holy waiting and sacred expectation. This is the season, considering the language of Pope Francis, that waiting and expecting translates into action. This is the season when we acknowledge that Jesus’s parents, holy refugees, traveled a similar road as well. May our prayers and our actions reflect the hope of who and how we are called to be... and may we make a difference this season.

Blessings,



