

Leading of the Spirit in Support of Child Refugees

From the Child Refugees and Migration Subcommittee of the Latin American Concerns Committee of Pacific Yearly Meeting

Friends gathered at the 2014 Pacific Yearly Meeting were moved by a refugee crisis that is unfolding on the US-Mexico border. Thousands of children and families are escaping violence in Latin America and seeking to reunite with loved ones in the United States. The crisis has many causes that require a thoughtful analysis to discern long-term non-violent solutions. In the meantime, we are led to follow God's will and show these refugees love.

Our leading comes from recent personal experience witnessing the violence, fear and longing for loved ones in Central American communities. Lynnette Arnold of Santa Barbara Monthly Meeting just returned from a visit to El Salvador in June 2014, where she visited a rural village she had lived in from 2000 to 2003. She experienced first-hand the very real danger pervading the country: on the third day of her visit, a young man was killed and his body left out in the street to spread fear. One mother told Lynnette that her twelve-year-old daughter, a tall, gangly adolescent with the face of a child, had been targeted for forced gang recruitment. With tears streaming down her face, this mother told Lynnette of her painful decision to escape this immediate threat to her child's wellbeing by sending her alone on the dangerous journey to join her father in the United States.

Our leading is also supported by biblical text and Quaker writing. When we say we seek to show love to those fleeing their homelands, we are moved by how love is expressed in Corinthians 13:4-8 (New International Version):

Love is patient, love is kind...It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

To show these refugees love is more than an emotion, it is taking action to work to ensure that they are treated in a way that is consistent with God's will. To show them love includes providing supportive caregiving, proper shelter and nutrition, medical and psychological treatment, prompt release from detention facilities, due process in immigration proceedings with legal representation, and family reunification whenever possible.

We recognize that these children and families are in need of help to guarantee that they are treated properly. Pacific Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice speaks eloquently to their position:

The Spirit we follow is present in each individual human being. To be true to that Spirit, we must recognize and nourish the spiritual worth of all people,

particularly those who have been devalued or excluded. Following the Spirit's leadings together, we hope to overcome the neglect or disrespect of children, the poor, and the socially marginalized.

Quakers have been led to work on behalf of children and the socially marginalized before. 110 thousand people of Japanese descent were held in internment camps during World War II. Quakers through the American Friends Service Committee started a program to get young people out of internment camps. AFSC found colleges and universities in Midwest and Eastern states that would be willing to receive evacuees who were already students or were eligible to enter schools of higher education. Approximately 4,000 students were aided through this program.

Today, Friends are working to take away the necessity for migration through projects such as the Guatemala Friends Scholarship Program of Redwood Forest Meeting and the El Salvador Project of Palo Alto Meeting. Friends have also been involved in responding compassionately to the situation of migrants through the work of Casa de los Amigos in Mexico City and the Scholarship Program for Undocumented Students of Sacramento Friends Meeting. At this time of crisis, supporting these efforts is more important than ever.

We encourage Friends to: support the lobbying efforts of FCNL and AFSC on this issue; consider becoming a foster parent to an unaccompanied child; make economic or in-kind donations to organizations that provide support to these children and the families that provide care for them. We urge Friends to raise their voices in vigils, letters to newspapers, and everyday conversations to emphasize the humanity of these refugees.