End Family Separation Briefing: June 2018

Origin: Last month, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced a new “zero tolerance” policy at the border and warned that children could be separated from their families. This shift has had a profound impact on hundreds of families who have been torn apart. Many of these families were already fleeing violence and seeking asylum in the United States. The stories are trickling in: A mother who had her child taken away while she was breastfeeding, a father who committed suicide in his cell after his child was ripped from his hands, and mothers being told their kids are going to be “taken away for a bath” only to not be returned. Because of the amount of immigrants being held in detention, this new policy also comes with the unprecedented shift to begin using federal prisons in California, Texas, Arizona, Washington, and Oregon as additional housing for those detained.

Oregon: As of the second week of June, there are 123 immigrant men being held at the Sheridan Federal Correctional Facility in Yamhill County while 174 women and 32 men are being held near SeaTac. Many of these men have been separated from their families and are seeking asylum. Lawyers, faith leaders, and community organizations are coordinating a response and need your help.

Faith Response: Separating parents from their children, adding trauma to the lives of those fleeing violence, and dehumanizing immigrants through policy and practice go against many of the foundations of our faith traditions, where family holds a special place. As we continue to work broadly for a more just and humane immigration policy, we are immediately focusing our local efforts around Sheridan. In the short-term, we are organizing clergy from around the state to do visits with the people detained inside and working with partner organizations to coordinate a community response that accompanies the legal strategy.

Faith Action: There are three immediate ways that you and your faith community can join with other faith communities in action this week:

1. **Show Up:** Monday, June 18th from 5:30-7pm for a large vigil and action at Sheridan. On the heels of Father’s Day, we’ll gather near the prison to call for an end to family separation. Public pressure and community support make a big difference and will help keep this story in the headlines. Carpool information available at the link above.

2. **Clergy:** are invited to sign a letter by Sunday, the 17th at midnight and indicate interest in visitation. The letter will go to the Warden and Chaplain at Sheridan requesting access to those detained for spiritual care and accompaniment. Since the next five weeks are critical for visitation, we’ll be in touch with information and an invitation to an orientation training in the next week.

3. **Pray:** In your worship services this week, please take a moment to share about this heartbreaking situation and pray for all immigrants impacted, especially those families separated from one another.

Sample Prayer: God of compassion, hear the cries of mothers, fathers, and children separated from one another. Comfort them in their time of need. May they know they are not alone. God of justice, grant us the courage to hear the cries of mothers, fathers, and children separated from one another. Help us to stand in solidarity, speak out, and boldly act. May we know we are not alone. Together we pray, Amen.

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