

COMMENTARY: Immigrant's plight prompts prayers

By Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

Special Contributor



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In the past year, Adalberto United Methodist Church has provided sanctuary for one of our church members, Elvira Arellano, and her son, Saulito. Ms. Arellano is an undocumented immigrant; 8-year-old Saul is a U.S. citizen.

As a mother, Ms. Arellano has indicated that she chose sanctuary over deportation so she could remain with her son. We have supported this church in prayer as it offered Ms. Arellano the chance to practice the centuries-old tradition of sanctuary, which draws upon a tradition of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience.

On Aug. 15, Ms. Arellano announced she has made a decision to leave the church to travel to the nation's capital to be part of a prayer vigil for immigration reform. [She was arrested Aug. 19 in Los Angeles]. We will continue to pray for Ms. Arellano and Saul, for the church and for all displaced people.

Clergy and lay members in many of our churches are in prayerful awareness of those at the margins of societies throughout the world—those who have been displaced from their homes by war and by economic or political oppression. The church will continue to raise a voice for justice for all of God's people. The church will continue its commitment to families and laws that unite rather than separate families.

We recognize that immigration is an issue that deeply divides our nation. We respect and honor those immigrants, refugees and sojourners who have come to this land, whether to seek a better life or as part of a forced or economically encouraged movement to provide cheap labor in our fields and factories.

Immigrants have built our churches and our communities and have contributed abundantly to our cultural fabric and diversity, which enriches us all.

The United Methodist Church has acknowledged the need for reform of immigration laws by noting that among refugees and other displaced people there are "economic migrants—those who flee dire poverty in search of employment and a way to feed their families. No matter what label they are given, they are usually vulnerable people in need of compassion and protection" (United Methodist Social Principles 164A).

While people of faith may disagree on the best ways to fix this nation's unworkable and outdated immigration laws, we affirm that the Bible directs Christians to care for foreigners in our midst (Exodus 23:9), and reminds us that we, too, are sojourners (Leviticus 25:23).

We also affirm that Jesus Christ embodied the love of God to the world and modeled how we are to act with love and compassion for those who come as strangers into our midst. Jesus' most pointed description of how human beings should act toward each other is in the story of the Good Samaritan, in which the love of God is expressed through compassion for those who face acts of oppression (Luke 10:33-34).

The story of the Good Samaritan reveals the radical love of God as expressed by Jesus Christ. This love transcends race, nationality and religion. It is a love that cries for justice and peace; it is a love that is sorely needed in the world today.

I call on all people of faith to pray for wisdom, courage and compromise over a complex issue that deeply divides the civil discourse of this country and affects millions of lives.

Bishop Jung is presiding bishop of the Northern Illinois Conference.

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Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, Aug 24, 2007

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