



# Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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## We Are Called to End Family Detention -- Now!

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*"Spirit, Spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness calling and free Spirit, Spirit of restlessness, stir [us] from placidness, wind, wind on the sea." -- Stephen Bevans, SVD at LCWR Assembly, 2015*

### EXPERIENCE

*It seems normal in so many ways, sitting on a park bench. It's a nice day and children and a few women play on a freshly-turfed soccer area. The woman seated beside me is from Honduras. She tells me about going to her mom's house after college classes one day. Her mom had been contacted by gang members for extortion money and had refused to pay. This daughter got to her mom's house as the bodies of her brother, mother, and wounded sister were being carried out of the house on stretchers. She's not interested in soccer.*

Dilley, Texas is the site of the South Texas Family Residential Center (STFRC) containing living quarters for more than 2,000 women and children, medical facilities including dental and mental health care, a library, school, soccer field, gymnasiums, colorful playground equipment, and two meeting rooms where religious services and "town halls" are held. Prison language is not used in relation to STFRC. Twelve residents live in

apartments rather than cell blocks, and are supervised by case managers, unit supervisors, and personnel who "check that everyone's ok" every 15-30 minutes around the clock.

This facility is the façade of compassionate care for women and children who have been forced to leave their home and country because of violence, death threats, extortion, and other horrors. They have seen family members killed and decided to flee to a country they thought would help them. The constant supervision, lack of privacy, and uncertainty about what will happen to them exacerbate the trauma they experienced leaving their homes and making a long dangerous journey. The US government has applied pressure and provided funds to the Mexican government to stop them from getting here, making the journey even more harrowing. They are refugees.

*I ask a woman how long she's been here. She and her daughter were brought here yesterday. The five-year old's eyes are fixed on me as the mom describes how they were taken by border patrol and pushed into a very cold*

*room with other women and children, so crowded they couldn't even sit on the floor. Guards made fun of them, threw food at them, kicked, and hit some of them. I kneel down to those large, five-year old eyes, and say "the people who did that were wrong. It was not your fault...."*

These mothers and children have been designated by the Obama administration -- through some bureaucratic quirk and to stop others from coming -- as a threat to the security of the United States.

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There have been many attempts to stop detention of women and children. Catholic bishops toured Dilley in March. In April an interfaith group held a prayer service at the gates. In May more than 600 people from around the country gathered outside in protest. Members of Congress visited in June, welcomed by tearful mothers and children with signs for help made out of their pillowcases and sheets. They held an impassioned press conference declaring they would not rest until the place was closed down.

Psychologists have expressed alarm about the long-lasting effects on children being incarcerated, and a former employee testified about the unethical medical practices she witnessed in Dilley's counterpart facility in Karnes City, Texas. There seemed to be a groundswell of public opinion and on July 25, when Federal Judge Dolly Gee upheld a ruling declaring detention of children to be illegal, the closure of STFRC seemed imminent. Jonathon Ryan, a lawyer and director of RAICES, which works tirelessly on behalf of immigrants, shared his knowledge and passion at the LCWR August assembly.

## SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Several months later, how can it be that detention of mothers and their children continues? Stalling, negotiating procedural changes, releasing some detainees but detaining even more – all these practices go on. Why? Why are they not recognized as refugees? What are the roots of such resistance to the call of our spiritual tradition to “welcome the stranger”?

Consider:

- Multinational corporations freely cross borders to exploit people and land for profit from fruit, coffee, palm oil, minerals, oil and goods—creating poverty, devastating the

environment, and forcing people to leave their homes.

- US policy in Central America laid the foundation for rampant violence as US arms flow south and drugs feed addictions in the north.
- Detention centers are run by private corporations whose lobbying efforts have resulted in the criminalization of illegal entry and the creation of immigrant bed quotas. Their alternatives to detention include electronic monitoring devices. Corporate profit is their bottom line.
- Some border patrol agents mistreat women and children with impunity.

On September 17 The US Commission on Civil Rights released a scathing report calling for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to immediately release families from detention. The issue is clearly not resolved and it is also not in the public eye.

## REFLECTION

Pope Francis reminds us “everything is connected”. We are not separate from the millions of refugees crossing our borders nor those in Europe. Can we open the doors of our churches, homes, and monasteries to the “stranger,” using our considerable resources for others? Perhaps more challenging, will we open our placid hearts to renewed courage and determination to confront structures causing such suffering? Can we help model the best of what it means to be human?

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We have learned to be informed and to speak out. We have made statements, presentations, and many changes in how we live and use our resources. What is the deeper call of the spirit in our restlessness? Are there ways to gal-

vanize our connections with others, use our voice, and take additional risks? It is said we are all called to be mystics. Let us strengthen our work as activists.

## ACTION

In keeping with the assembly resolution on systemic causes of injustice, and in the context of world's refugee crisis, organize a serious effort that can be sustained until mothers and children are no longer detained, and refugees have found homes.

- Make this situation known to women, especially mothers.
- Demand that US policies and corporate involvement in Central America change so that people no longer need to flee.
- Involve the voice and experience of Catholic health care providers to help proclaim the harm of detention to children.
- Pro-actively respond to Pope Francis's request that we welcome refugee families through use of our facilities and resources.
- Advocate for passage of the HR 3543/S. 2054 Justice Is Not For Sale Act that bans private prisons, ends family detention, and removes Immigration and Custom Enforcement's (ICE) daily mandate to fill 34,000 beds with detainees and support Senator Chris Coon's amendment to HR 719 to end the immigrant detention bed quota.
- Consider use of public witness that is noticeable, newsworthy, prayerful, and continues until satisfactory results are achieved.
- Involve family and friends, associates and co-members, students, staff, faculty, co-workers, women's groups such as PTA, Legion of Mary, League of Women Voters, and others, parishes, other faith communities.