

Bishop Ough issues statement on Trump immigration order

MINNEAPOLIS, MN—*Bishop Bruce R. Ough, resident bishop of the Dakotas-Minnesota Area of The United Methodist Church, released the following statement in a press conference held by the Minnesota Council of Churches, on January 30, 2017, at Hennepin UMC in Minneapolis, MN.*

Today, I stand with colleagues representing several faith traditions to strongly denounce President Trump's widespread attack on immigrants and refugees. President Trump's reckless, ill-conceived executive orders will divide families, impose a religious test for Muslims facing forced migration, penalize communities providing sanctuary and wall off the United States from our neighbors. These actions are expensive, unnecessary and profoundly antithetical to our values of compassion, dignity and justice for all individuals regardless of nationality, religious affiliation or legal status.

The biblical witness is clear and unambiguous. Walls are unbiblical. Hospitality is biblical. Denying one's neighbor is unbiblical. Welcoming the stranger is biblical. It is not surprising that Judaism, Christianity and Islam teach the reign of God as a banquet to which all peoples are invited. We are to welcome the sojourner, love our neighbor and stand with the most vulnerable among us. These very values from our sacred texts and faith traditions are currently reflected in the mandate of the U. S. Refugee Admissions Program and must not be usurped by any executive order. Orders, legislation or administrative actions that would have the U. S. State Department disqualify refugees from protection and resettlement based on their nationality or religion are a denial of the very principles this nation was built upon, contradict the legacy of leadership our country has offered the world, and dishonor our shared humanity.

Jesus was explicit in his teachings. In Matthew's gospel Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." (*Matthew 10:40*).

Refugees and immigrants arrive among us, not only with their needs, but also bearing gifts of energy, resourcefulness, love of liberty and hope. These gifts have always contributed to the renewal of our society and the church.

Above all, these strangers bring to us the Christ. When we welcome a stranger we welcome Jesus, and when we welcome Jesus we welcome our creator. Refugees, immigrants, those yearning to be free—these are the ones whom Jesus spoke about when he said, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (*Matthew 25:35*).

Repeatedly Jesus tells his disciples:

"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." (*Matthew 16:25*)

The original Greek language is far more poetic, powerful and prophetic. In finer translations of the Greek language, we hear Jesus saying:

“Whoever seeks to build a wall around their soul shall destroy it; whoever tears down the wall (around their soul) shall bring their soul to a living birth.”

The very soul of our country is at stake. When we abandon strangers who are at risk of bigotry, xenophobia and violence we not only destroy their hope, we destroy our own souls. When we fail to assist the refugees fleeing danger, we not only place them in harm’s way, we do harm to our own souls. When we build walls of concrete, or walls of divisive rhetoric, or walls of fear, or walls of immoral immigration policies, we build a wall around our own souls.

Christ calls us to tear down the walls around our souls that we might live fully and abundantly. Thus, I call on the Trump administration and the U. S. Congress to rescind the harmful executive orders and save the soul of our country. I call upon the people of Minnesota and the Dakotas to see the face of Christ in the refugee. Say “no” to the walling off of our country and our hearts and say “yes” to their hope – our hope – for new life. Let us unite and work together to bring the soul of this country to a living birth!

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