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Community Conversation on Family Separation, Detention, and Witness
Cathedral of the Incarnation, Baltimore
Hosted by ERICA- Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Center Alliance

Speakers:

Rev. Scott Slater, Canon to the Ordinary, Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Eric Seymour, Esperanza Center
Michael Lynch, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Karen Gonzalez, D.C. Detention Visitation Network

Speakers' Introductions

Speakers

Rev. Scott Slater: I am here by invitation to talk about my experience in Austin, Texas as a deputy for the Diocese of Maryland for our General Convention. But I want to personalize it with the trip back from the public witness.

Immigration has been a personal issue for me for quite some time. As a college student in California, I was visiting my older sister and met an immigrant working on her property. His name was Manuel* and he was my age. He came across the border as a teenager, worked and sent money back to his family in Mexico. The last time I saw my sister a year ago, I saw Jessica*, a social worker who lives nearby. Her parents worked for my sister. They raised Jessica alongside my nephew. The two were good friends. Now Jessica is a college graduate, a citizen and a mother. 3 generations of her family live nearby. It (immigration) becomes a personal issue when we meet with those affected.

I was one of 4 clergy representing the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland at the General Convention in Texas. On a Sunday, a day with little legislation scheduled, we had the chance to worship indoors, but many of us delegates spent the day outdoors. First, at a Bishops United against Gun Violence rally in the morning, and then traveling by bus for an hour to the Hutto Detention Center in the afternoon. It was a much more powerful worship experience- much better than being in the pew of a church.

You see the idea to visit Hutto was born from a deacon based in New York. She had had a vision to do this. She got a grant to finance this effort—organizing 19 buses with a thousand deputies and bishops.



We gathered in a staging area outside of the two fences protected by barbed wire. Imagine a 1000 individuals, crossing a dirt road- to stand public witness to support hundreds of women in detention.

We didn't know how much they could see through tiny windows across a field where we were. But as we marched up toward the entrance, singing and chanting, we knew they knew that we were there because at one point as we were singing a song, and again about 200 feet away, a white handkerchief or perhaps it was a Kleenex –we'll never really know- appeared in one of the windows and started waving us. And that was chilling, I gotta tell you. That was the one memory that all of us will take away, knowing that we had been seen, knowing that our public witness was being acknowledged by the people who had been housed there.

We heard after the fact from reports of folks working at the center that our public witness meant a tremendous amount to the people being housed there, many of whom had been there for months.

But part of the aspect I wanted to leave you with is that when we do a public witness, when we protest, sometimes it makes us feel better but we really don't know what impact it has on the issue or on the lives of the people affected by the issue. We had the great fortune of seeing visibly how that public witness had impact for at least one person who could see us through the window of her room. But it also has impact for those of us who were there during that witness. Every time I have taken part in a protest or public witness, part of the education that I experience from the stories that I tell and the stories I hear from others that are witnessing with me, are part of the impact for me. So I want to tell you 2 quick stories.

As we were walking from the staging area to where we stopped and did our final singing, there was a woman walking alongside me. And presuming that she was an Episcopal deputy from somewhere, I introduced myself and asked her where she was from. And she said "Texas. I'm not with you all. I just come and do this regularly. I was at Brownsville, Texas last week at another ICE detention center. She then said, "Tell me about you all." So that was a wonderful opportunity to tell her how a thousand people just showed up in 19 buses. She was impressed with the public witness of a church denomination's leaders and the fact that she was not doing this alone that day.

The other person I had the chance to talk to right around that same spot was a man who had spoken earlier that morning at the Bishops Against Gun Violence rally. He is the father of one of the Parkland shooting victims, who had come to speak about the impact of gun violence on his life. And he, his wife, his children – his surviving children- spent the afternoon, coming with us and being part of that public witness. And so someone whose life had been severely traumatized a few months ago and had given a lot of his emotional self out that morning, who



could have easily gone back to his hotel room and taken a nap, instead chose to make a public witness about another issue--very unrelated to the one that impacted his life just a few months earlier.

These issues don't just impact the people who are being detained. They impact their family members. They impact people whom they work for, who work for them. It spreads a long way. For me, it always comes down to people. That story for me began when I met Manuel*, almost 40 years ago. His story became more than just an issue for me; it became a story of personal impact. Any time we do a public witness or take part in any kind of action that helps an issue, it is impacting people and real people's stories. Thank you.

Q: I'm just curious. My brother is a journalist and he's made a point to go to a lot of these places but he's never been welcomed or allowed. You said there was media there- I was curious if you could photograph things or whether that was not allowed.

A: Yes, things were photographed. You can actually google it and find, I think, a video in fact of by our Presiding Bishop there. So most of the media there were credential media for our event since we had a fairly good media presence for our Convention. I'm not aware of any outside media there- there may have been. There were a thousand of us so it was hard to tell [who was who, from where]. As far as I know since I was an organizer, the person who did organize it [the public witness] did get all the permissions necessary for us to be there. But even then, there was a police- I think it was a sheriff's- car making sure that we weren't moving too far off the road or too close, and would make warnings through a bullhorn at times [if they perceived us to be].

Q: Were there any interactions with any of the detention managers?

A: No. We saw no one who worked in the building. Just the 1 police officer on the outside.

Q: You mentioned the handkerchief. I thought I read somewhere that someone put or the women inside made a cross.

A: Bishop Chilton talked about that in her story. I don't remember seeing that myself. Perhaps someone made the sign of the cross. Again, we were about 200 feet away.

Q: Just a brief question- Do you know if this detention center is privately owned or operated?

A: I actually don't know that. I recall hearing that the county residents were trying to get the center closed down because they want detain immigrants any more or be known for that. Again, those centers impact the local population either in positive or negative ways, and lean on lots of factors.

ERICA: We will now move on to hear from Esperanza Center, its many facets, in particular its work on family reunification efforts.



ES: Hi everybody! My name is Eric and I work with the Esperanza Center. First before I start, does everyone know what Esperanza means in English? (A couple audience members: “Hope”.) That’s right- Esperanza means hope. Esperanza Center is a multiservice, immigrant resource provider. Esperanza Center works with about 11,000 people each year. We do a lot of different things for those people. We have an immigration legal services program that provides low cost or pro-bono advice or representation. We do that for people from all over the world; last year we had saw over 130 countries represented in that program alone and we see people in that program, in all programs, from across the state of Maryland. We also have a health services program. Our health clinics see a very specific group of immigrants; we see people who are both uninsured and uninsurable. I’m sure folks here know the meaning of uninsured. Does anyone want to take a guess what uninsurable means in this context? (Audience member: “Uninsurable are undocumented.”) Yes- uninsurable means the individual is ineligible for traditional alternative forms of health insurance- like Medicare, Medicaid, and now, the Affordable Care Act. Undocumented immigrants are categorically ineligible for all types of all of those programs that I just mentioned- can’t seek care unless it is last resort. And that is where our program comes in. We see about 2000 patients a year for primary and preventative care. And we have an extensive network, relationships with hospitals- particularly with Johns Hopkins, who allows us to refer our patients to their specialty providers at no charge.

We also have an educational services program. Our primary focus is English as a Second Language [ESL] which we teach to both adults and youth. Our youth program is an afterschool program, 2 times a week, tutoring program, and its main focus is English acquisition- ideally helping kids who are enrolled in Baltimore City Schools in an ESL program move through those programs as quickly as possible. But we also try to spend some time, focusing on self care, acculturation, anti-bullying, etc. During the summer, that (youth) program becomes a 5-weeklong intensive program and the goal of our summer program is 1) to be as fun as possible, and 2) to help these kids keep from regressing during the summer. So we put our summer program right in the middle of summer and they spend 6 hours/day learning, and practicing English. We also teach adult ESL students. We offer flexible, 1 on 1 programming but also citizenship and computer literacy classes. We also recently started offering Spanish classes- mostly for our volunteers who wanted to use our ESL tutoring program to learn Spanish and that is the spirit of the ESL program.

In our client services program - that is the last program in our main building on Broadway- that helps clients with anything that I have not mentioned beforehand- employment, housing, filling out forms, enrolling their kids in school, doing something at the MVA, notarizing something, writing letters. We have caseworkers that work with crime victims in that program- I could keep going if we had more time. But basically, if no one inside the building knows how to answer



someone's question or if the question is outside their bailiwick- they will be sent to our Client Services program and we will help them to the best of our ability.

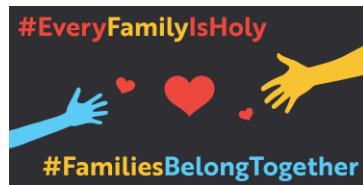
The last program I wanted to discuss, maybe it is most in the news right now, is our family reunification program. Our family reunification program has formally been in existence for over 4 years- since 2014- when we started to receive what was commonly referred to as “the surge”—significant uptick of unaccompanied minors arriving at the US southern border. Before then, we were used to seeing between 5 and 10,000 unaccompanied children a year. An “unaccompanied child” (UAC) is a child who arrives without a parent/guardian accompanying them. And I believe in 2014, and Michael you can correct me if I am getting this number wrong, I think the number went up to about 50,000. And it's [the number of UACs arriving in the US] been about 50(000) to 60,000 a year since. And the reason these children are coming to the US is because they are fleeing really horrific violence in their home countries. They are predominately coming from 3 countries in Central America which comprise what is commonly referred to as the Northern Triangle – which is El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala. El Salvador and Honduras are typically jockeying for the most homicidal country on the planet and these children are coming from those countries because teenagers make about the most attractive target for gang recruitment and gang violence. It's pretty common that the kids we see at Esperanza Center came to the US because they were turning- I think the youngest we have worked with that came unaccompanied was 5 - but most are between 11 and 16 years. They come during those ages because the most common story we hear was they were approached for recruitment by a gang. These gangs in these countries have a lot of power because of a lot of reasons. These countries have been destabilized by foreign involvement- and in turn, have a pretty weak, corrupt, ineffective central government. Because of the various wars and coups, starting the 1970s/80s, they have a lot more guns than they know what to do with. And finally, the United States exported gang violence to these countries after we housed undocumented immigrants alongside our federal prison population and then sent them home. When someone is approached for gang recruitment, they have a couple options. Either acquiesce and join a gang, which means committing a crime that is really horrific. Or they can refuse –and likely become the next target of gang violence – either you, your family. Or flee and that is what a lot of children are doing. They're fleeing once they have been recruited or their parents are sending them away before they get to that point [of recruitment] because they are so scared. Earlier this summer- the administration began what it is referring to as its “zero tolerance” policy, which basically means anyone arrested at the southern border was charged with a misdemeanor. And according to the [federal] government, it meant that legally that they were required to separate children from adults who had been charged with this. This had not been the policy previously. And although they say this is accordance to the law, without too much looking, you can find clips online - with federal officials, flirting with this policy as early as a year ago. This policy was recently ended but it has not been resolved yet. There were several parents who were essentially tricked into signing away their rights to legal processes in return



of getting reunited with their children. They were then deported. You will find that a certain number of children that were separated from their parents and their parents are no longer in this country. I think it won't be long before we learn that some children were never properly tracked. I don't think we at Esperanza Center have specific knowledge about that but I think we will probably find that. One thing I would like to make clear- this was the immigration issue du jour- this was the crisis of the summer. It is not the first one, nor will it be the last one. This is the latest in a string of policies employed by this administration against undocumented immigrants. Another thing I wanted to say about family separation- we have a different word for it at the Esperanza Center and the word we use is deportation. And I don't think it is any bit less humane to separate someone from their family by arresting them in their home, rather than separate them at the border. And we see deportation all the time. We saw it under the Obama administration. And deportation most of the time is family separation. In US, there are approximately 11 million that are undocumented. What percentage of those people do you think are parents of US children? (Audience member: "50%".) Yes, I think 50% -60% of those undocumented are parents of US citizens. Those US citizen children could go back with their parents to their home country but most that we see at the Esperanza Center are left in the care of another parent or close family friend. But I am going off topic. What I was going to say was that our family reunification program has been around for 4 years, helping unaccompanied children to reunite with their families here in the US. A lot of unaccompanied children come to the US with someone in mind- either to be with a parent, sibling, aunt, uncle-maybe a close family friend the child has never even met. Older children [typically] will come with [relatives' contact] addresses, numbers memorized or written down somewhere. Younger children [typically] will come with [this type of] contact information pinned to their clothing in Ziploc bags or written [on their person] in sharpie [marker]. And the shelters try to reunite these families as quickly as possible. So through our family reunification program we try to help their [the child/ren's] sponsor – family member, move through that process quickly. And now that program is helping *separated* children in the US reunite with someone that they now- typically not the parent that they came into the US with. The roughly 2000 kids that came this summer and were separated became part of the same system, process for unaccompanied children. We at Esperanza have another case manager in that [unaccompanied children] program helping separated children reunite with their families.

Q: What is the typically length of that reunification long process takes?

A: I think the target is about 1 month. The government will not release someone unless then have done a background screening on every adult that lives in the home. A lot of the families we work with live in multifamily dwellings. A lot of the families we work with are undocumented and live with other undocumented people. And as you can imagine, they are not eager to submit themselves to background checks which include a fingerprint scan. Earlier this summer, we received notification from our funders and the government that it was possible for information shared with this program to also be shared with the Department of



Homeland Security. So we have to advise all of our clients about this. Usually, what causes a delay in reunification is that they won't get everyone in the home to submit to a background check and in the worst case scenario, the family has to move and therefore the process has to be restarted. But usually it takes about 1 month.

ERICA: But that's after being in shelter.

Esperanza: Yes, after the caseworker has initiated contact with that relative-that portion of the process last typically 3 weeks to 1 month.

ERICA: But there have been children have been held longer than 1 month (in DHS), before going to shelter and then getting referred to you all....

Esperanza: There's a policy that children cannot remain in Department of Homeland Security detention for no more than 48 hours, before being released to a shelter operated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which is not part of the Department of Homeland Security but part of Department of Health and Human Services.

Q: Is anyone that you servicing or someone higher up the food chain lobbying Congress to get a bill passed (to act against this)?

A: Not at Catholic Charities. Catholic Charities is our parent nonprofit. We [Esperanza] are a direct service provider. We don't so much advocacy. Most of the advocacy that we do is at a state, local level. But there are many organizations that are lobbying, for a change in policy. And that is a great segue into my last point, which is about what you can do.

What you can do- if you are upset about what this administration is treats immigrants generally - the first thing you can do is what you are doing now- showing up and making sure that you are properly informed. That you are informing yourself, your friends & family. The second thing you can do is show up for politicians. Politicians that stand up for undocumented people are taking a bit of gamble because they are standing up for people who cannot vote for them. They do so because it is the right thing to do- not because they can get votes. And I can tell that those on the other side, those with anti-immigration views, will show up. For those of you that we here last time you've already heard this: a couple years ago, Baltimore County was under consideration to enter a 287-G agreement- which would have created an interrelationship with Baltimore [County] Police Department and ICE. If you had been at the meeting where this was discussed, you would've thought that half of Baltimore County was there for this discussion. What we found out was that anti-immigration groups had bused people from outside of this jurisdiction to be at that meeting to make it appear that the local community was anti-immigration. But fortunately, people on our side showed up and in the end, the council decided not to pass this measure. And one last thing that I am going to say. We often think about immigration in federal terms and it is indeed a federal issue. But a lot of the measures that affect immigrants' day to day life are state and local policies. I often say that if you are an undocumented person in Baltimore City, you have it better than an undocumented person in



Frederick, and an undocumented person in Frederick is better off than one in Virginia. And that is because local and state officials in Baltimore and Maryland have taken steps to make the local systems more welcoming to the undocumented. A great example of this is that in MD, an undocumented individual is allowed to get a driver's license, and that means any time they get behind the wheel, they are not breaking the law. If they get pulled over, they most likely will not be arrested. In the US, only 12 or 13 states allow undocumented folks to get a driver's license. In a lot of places, unless you live in a major city you will most likely need to drive to go to work, go to the grocery store, take your kids to school. So in northern VA, every time you [an undocumented person] get behind the wheel of a car, you are breaking the law. And when you get pulled over for not using your turn signal, that is not a big deal. But when the officer asks you for a driver's license and you don't have one, you can find yourself in removal proceedings pretty quickly. So keeping pressure on state, and local representatives is just as important as keeping pressure on national representatives. I'm running short on time and so I am going to hand off to the next person unless there any more questions that can wait until the end. Thank you.

KIND: Thank you Eric- you covered a lot of great points. My name is Michael and I'm the social services coordinator for KIND which stands for Kids in Need of Defense.

Eric gave a great background but 25 to 30 days is the average length in shelter. It is increasing now though as some potential sponsors are being intimidated about cooperation with ICE. And the longest separation that I have heard about [child is in shelter] was 7 weeks. Some of these reunited children that we see at KIND are exhibiting signs of PTSD- some that were speaking before [entering detention] no longer speaks. Some [of our clients] appear to be experiencing symptoms of catatonia- they just shut down.

So KIND was started in 2008 to represent unaccompanied kids in immigration court. Eric covered this earlier but the government's term is UAC – unaccompanied alien child. Usually these are older children, adolescents who cross the border alone without a parent/guardian, usually seeking safety and assistance. Increasingly fewer and fewer of them describe economic reasons for coming. Most of them state that they are fleeing violence, fleeing abuse, crime, overall unsafe situations. And that has been KIND's primary program- we provide legal representation to unaccompanied kids in *immigration court* because unlike other court systems in America, there is no statutory right to counsel in immigration proceedings; you can either provide your own counsel or go underrepresented. Children with an attorney (representation) are 5 times as likely to state legally because we estimate 60% - some sources say 65%- of unaccompanied kids have a valid case for legal relief whether that be asylum, U visa (visa for victims of crime), or other forms of relief, such as one that is lesser known, called special immigrant juvenile status – which our government does convey if the threshold of need is met.



So that is what KIND was doing until 2013. Then, KIND started providing social services in addition to their legal services. In addition to the legal assistance KIND provides, they also try to connect their clients to various social services including health care, mental health treatment, access to education, and family stability services.

One of the documents I handed out is a timeline as it relates to the current administration's policy decisions that have reduced protections and limited access to certain avenues of legal relief for unaccompanied youth, including the decision to institute family separation. This is from a larger KIND report called "Death by a Thousand Cuts" (<https://supportkind.org/resources/death-by-a-thousand-cuts/>). It was around March 2017 the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security first mentioned in the press the intent to use family separation as a means of deterrence- to deter people from bringing their children to the US. Let's be clear -these were accompanied children-with their moms, with their dads. Eric is right -it was around April 2018 when we received a memo from ORR that they were obliged to cooperate with ICE, which had never happened before. When an unaccompanied child presented her/himself at the border, and then was detained, transferred to an ORR shelter, it was a matter of fact - that you could contact the potential sponsor and pretty much assure them that their contact information would not be shared (with ICE). ORR is not a law enforcement agency- it's under HHS. When we got that memo (in April 2018), we had to inform [potential sponsors] that there were no guarantees that their information would not be shared. [The policy] has definitely scared people away. Kids are now spending longer periods in ORR shelters, care [in part because there have been delays in connecting with a sponsor].

In April 2018, the family separation issue started picking up. We started hearing numbers of 600-700 kids being separated from their families. In May 2018, it was announced every single undocumented immigrant who crossed the border would be prosecuted for committing a misdemeanor. So when you arrest an adult with a child and charged the adult with a crime, a state crime, you had to separate child. It is important to note that asylum law is law. It is in the federal code. And when you prevent someone from going through normal procedures when seeking asylum, you're potentially violating the law, as far as we're [KIND] concerned. President Trump signed the executive order in June 2018 ending the practice. But it hasn't ended. Family separation didn't start in April 2018; it started a long time ago. It was discretionary. Then it was policy. Now they are trying to reunify these kids. The most updated number that I last heard was about [separated kids] was 2700. As of Thursday, I read a report that 525 kids remain separated, and have not been reunified. Almost 350 parents have been removed. The government reports that over 120 of them [of 350] signed documents consenting to their own deportation. The ACLU and another law firm are investigating claims of coercion. I'm not going to say much more about that because there are certain things that may come out of that .
Q: Are there some [children] from whom we don't know who the parents are?



A: There are some parents we haven't been able to get in touch with but we're not the only one working on this. KIND has 10 field offices, one of which is in New York. Our attorneys in NY have visited children at the Cayuga Centers in NY. I want to make clear that a lot of shelters are not bad guys. They do good work- they have standards of care that they adhere to. The ones that we have here in MD- Bethany Christian Services and others - do good work. There are other for-profit facilities; there are facilities that are not licensed child care facilities where some of these immigrant children are being held. And that is why you kept hearing that the federal government cannot host these [separated] children for more than 20 days. But that does not apply to unaccompanied children. Unaccompanied children can be housed in the ORR system indefinitely. I have clients in ORR care for over 1 year- because they were in staff secure settings. Accompanied children or those that were rendered unaccompanied upon entry in the US and being separated from their families- cannot be housed in an unlicensed child care facility by law for more than 20 days except in extreme circumstances—like the 2014 surge. And that is when you saw the former army bases being used to house kids [in 2014].

Someone asked what can we do. There is a lot of legislation out there that is aimed at trying to help these {separated, unaccompanied} kids and KIND has been actively advocating on the Hill to trying to get these protections passed including the Fair Day in Court for Kids Act, which would require all undocumented kids under 18 to have mandated representation in immigration court. You can spread the word- by doing what you're doing right now, by having community conversations. You can support the organizations that you care about like Catholic Charities, KIND. We just did a back to school drive last weekend where we gave 70 backpacks filled with school supplies to unaccompanied children including a few of the recent family separation cases. KIND has taken the family separation issue seriously; we have actually created a new legal department that is solely working on family separation. This is outside of our traditional mission- we are expanding our mission. We are no longer focusing just on children in family separation cases but are now working with parents. KIND was sending multiple waves of staff to the border up until last week. We were sending attorneys, paralegals, assistants -mainly to Port Isabel Detention Center, which is where a lot of the parents who were separated from their children were sent. The attorneys who were there were conducting CFIs - credible fear interview- screening the adults for validity and likelihood of their asylum claims for the reasons they cannot go back. We have been coordinating representation for them [the parents with a Texas based organization called PROBAR, which has taken on a lot of those cases. We created 4 new staff attorney positions for support. We gotten a lot of support - support from celebrities. We are actively trying to find representation for some of these cases.. We're trying to represent some of those parents that have been separated from their children. As you will see on that handout with the timeline sometime after March 2018, when changes to the asylum law were announced including definition of membership to a particular social group. Under the prior administration, threats from gangs as well as domestic violence could potentially serve as credible reasons for seeking asylum as a member of a particular social



group, but that has been restricted. I think you're getting a lot of good information by being here today. I think getting informed, getting involved also helps. YouTube is also a good way to get information. There is a YouTube series run by immigration attorney who asks her own kids what they know about US immigration law. (<https://youtu.be/SUQwou7qllc>). I appreciate you welcoming me to come talk to you and I welcome any questions.

DCDVC: My name is Karen, and I represent the DC Detention Visitation network. I got involved through my employer, World Relief is a faith based organization. It is the humanitarian arm for the National Association of Evangelicals. And they made this short video with all of these well known evangelical women. And they were reading Matthew 25-a section you are familiar with. "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." Those were the words of Jesus. Part of what they highlighted and kept reading over in the video was the phrase "I was in prison and you visited me." And I was struck by that.

And so the first time I went, I went to Howard County Detention Center here in Jessup. You come in and it's a prison. You have to take all of your belongings –your cell phone, your keys- everything- into a little locker. You wait your turn, and give your driver's license to a guard and sit down, pick up a phone to talk to this person [detainee] sitting on the other side of a glass wall for an hour before they [the guards] alert you to your time being up.

So the first time I went to Jessup, I met with a Spanish speaker – a woman detainee. Because I speak Spanish, it is a little bit more flexible on who I can meet with. She, like most immigrants, was doing the work that the rest of us don't do in our country. She was doing custodial work overnight, was driving home and had a rear light that was out, was pulled over and ended up in detention in Jessup, Maryland, where she has no family. She doesn't know anyone and there she was waiting. She had been there about for 3 months when we met. The average stay is about 30 days but she had been there about 3 months. So I want you to imagine how it would affect your life crossing the border – committing a misdemeanor crime.

But she had been in detention for 3 months waiting to hear what would happen to her case. And it was one of the hardest times that I could remember [from my visits] at the detention center. She cried the entire time on the phone. She was the sole support for her 2 daughters who were university students back in her home country. They had no other means of support- no father in the picture.. No one could help her with legal support, emotional support. She was truly alone. Aside from those from the DC Detention Visitation Center, no one came to see her or talk to her. She just sat in boredom, anxiety, worried about her family. She was eventually deported back to her home country.

I'm not going to lie to you. Detention visitation is very difficult work because you are listening and present to someone's suffering. It is very hard work to do. Sometimes, I go and the person



is like this woman. Sometimes, the individual [detainee] is optimistic. Other times, the detainee is angry about why they did what they did that day and ended up in detention. So nobody that I had talked to has ever committed a crime to be in this kind of place, where they are talking to me through glass via phone. To me, that is unconscionable. It is hard to understand why immigrants are treated this way.

And so the detention centers that we [the Network] visit are 2 in number. We visit 1 on the Eastern Shore and we visit 1 in here in Jessup. We [the Network] go about twice a month. I've never been to the Eastern Shore facility. I've gone to the one in Jessup several times. Jessup's population is now only males. You don't have to speak Spanish or English to be there. You can speak other languages. I once spoke to a man from an African Anglophone country. Sometimes, there are people from the Caribbean and so you can talk to different people.

I believe this to be a very holy ministry- requiring presence and listening. Even though I am a Christian, all of us went through training. We were very clearly informed that this is not opportunity to proselytize. We can't say that we pray for you. We don't do anything like that. We let them lead the conversation- they're in a position of privilege in this situation. So whatever they want to talk about – is what we talk about. Their families, sports. If they want to talk about a movie, we will talk about that movie. That's what we do- they guide the conversation.

Q: How does the detainee connect with your network?

A: There is an announcement made that we are visiting in the near future and they volunteer that they wish to receive a visitor.

Q: Is there follow up?

A: There is no follow up. We're there to offer them friendship, presence. So one of the important things about this work is that you cannot offer false promises. It is very tempting you want to solve people's problems. You're told in training that you're there to offer friendship, not to solve problems. And if you make promises, and give them false hope, you can make the situation worse. At training, you're told what you can say and not say. I have been through immigration legal training and I know whether if one has an immigration solution or not. All the people I have talked to [in detention] have no immigration solution. Other questions?

Q: Your website talks about being assigned to a particular person developing an ongoing relationship visiting and sending letters. Is that correct?

A: That can happen but I've never done that. I have only met with the same person twice. As I said earlier, people are usually in detention for about 30 days before deportation. I have never been able to meet with the same person more than twice. And we are only allowed to make 2



visits a month. The detention center has to give us permission to visit. You can't just come when you want. With visitation, there are certain limitations on what we can do.

Somebody was asking about for profit prisons. 70% of detention centers are for profit. There are much more humane, and low cost ways for one to track where immigrants are. There is ankle monitoring. There are ICE check ins. So to place them not only far from home- but in jail- for crossing the border to help their families, for a broken light, is the cruelest thing I can imagine.

The last thing I wanted to say is that the detention centers that we visit houses only adults. They were undocumented and then they did something that jeopardized their status. In Jessup, they [the detainees] come from all over the country. You have to go to a 1 hour training to do detention visitation. If you can sit and listen, you can do this work. You can also call your legislative representatives and tell them that you support immigrants, you welcome immigrants. You as a voter need to let them know that you support them if they support immigration reform. And so I end there.