



August 9, 2018

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

Speakers:

Bishop Chilton Knudsen

Esperanza Center- Val Twanmoh, Mike Borogonos, Eric Seymour

Sanctuary Streets Baltimore- Andrew Reinel

\*Speakers' Introductions\*

## Speakers

**Bishop Chilton Knudsen:** How many you see this piece of paper? (Bishop Chilton is holding a piece of paper with quotes and a picture of a man addressing an audience<sup>1</sup>.) This is an image of Bishop Michael Curry on the grounds of the Hutto Detention Center. This is the most brutal of detention centers. This houses 500 women who have been detained, separated from family and awaiting action. Many have been there for months, some for years. It's a former penitentiary. This is a detention center- it's where people are being detained, and housed. They are being mistreated. Their nutrition is barely adequate. Many have mental and health needs that are not being addressed. Some folks who work in these settings have not been socialized with compassion and justice. We knew this coming into Austin. Every 3 years, the Episcopal church has a convention. We have workshops, services, social events, committee meetings. By the time 2 weeks have gone by, everybody is a zombie. What people remember about convention is the heart stuff. People remember the heart moments- what I experienced in Texas was a heart moment. Due to some contacts we had in Texas, we found out that Austin was 40 miles from Taylor Texas. Through a number of connections in Texas, we got permission from the state to stage a witness on the premises of the detention center. Not close but not far away. There were 1000 Episcopalians on 19 buses, on a hot afternoon. 106 degrees, with only 1 canopy for the most frail and old. We prayed, we sang, we heard from people who knew about life inside.

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<sup>1</sup> Piece of paper Bishop Chilton was holding and referring to had the following quote at the top: "We do not come in hatred, we do not come in bigotry, we do not come to put anybody down, we come to life everybody up. We come in love. We come in love because we follow Jesus, and Jesus taught us love." (The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop, The Episcopal Church, T. Don Hutto Residential Center, Taylor, TX – July 8, 2018) [The man in the photo was Bishop Curry addressing the group of public witnesses organized by the Episcopal Church at Hutto.]



Slowly and surely, a ripple went through the crowd, it was like people were tugging on the sleeves. We saw rectangles of white paper moving around in the center's windows, first in circles, and then in cross signs. In other words, we got it. They know that we are here. They are trying to send us blessings- the best way they can. We found out later from folks who work with the women inside that they heard us from the inside. They heard our singing, the electric guitar. They were moved that the church came to be with them-amazingly moved that we came to be with them. 1000 in a small space with one heart and one mind. The fact that we had that connection with them, will never leave me. For nights afterwards, when I would go to sleep, I was seeing pictures-(of) the sign of the cross (being) made in the windows. A connection was made. A blessing was being bestowed. And that was a blessing.

As a religious leader, a person of faith, this has always been what to do-making the world a safe place – making it possible for people to leave an unsafe place. Our presiding bishop- that quote, was responding to the Episcopal Church being shamed for being political. That we are causing division, we are taking political positions, that would cause jeopardy for us. It was the world watching us -the Episcopal Church - being transparent. And Bishop Curry, said we are love. We do this because of Jesus. Not politics. He went onto say “We are here to call our neighbor”- all persons from all corners. This message resonates. I brought back absolute clarity, that we are talking about justice and compassion. I will not give politicians the right to mess around with those spiritual principles. I’m going to end with that.

Does anyone have questions? No. Okay, you can ask later.

**Esperanza:** It is difficult to follow Bishop Chilton. First, let me ask if anyone is not familiar with the Esperanza Center? [Some hands are raised.] Okay let me tell you about the Esperanza Center. We are a comprehensive center. We provide educational services, free medical care for the undocumented. We provide legal services. We provide client services. Eric manages that which does everything not handled earlier. And family reunification- we have been doing this since 2014. We care and work with unaccompanied children- since the first wave of unaccompanied children first appeared.

So in that situation, this is what happens. The (unaccompanied) child will turn themselves at the border to Customs and Border Protection (CBP). They will then be handed over to the Office of Refugee Resettlement- ORR- which sits under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and placed in an ORR-run shelter. Once in that shelter, efforts are undertaken to locate a parent or relative, in order to reunite these children with their families. The parent most likely has been looking for their child, as in most cases, they (the parent) has arrived in the US before the child. With reunification, there is a process involving paperwork, fingerprinting. Esperanza helps with this process- helping to secure fingerprints and so forth and helps families after the process has been completed. Sometimes, a “home study” is recommended. A home study is when there is a background check of the child’s prospective home before they are released



from federal custody. The government contracts out these home studies. Esperanza Center will do these [home studies] to complete the family reunification process. After reunification, we have staff at Esperanza that provide services—“post release” to support this [family reunification]—school enrollment, counseling, etc. Since 2013, Esperanza has been engaged in reunifying on average 1000 children a year. (The state of) Maryland is 6<sup>th</sup> in the nation for reunification.

**Q:** Does parent need to be documented for reunification?

**A:** A parent does not have to be documented for reunification. The vast majority of families are undocumented but there are some that are blended (1 parent has status, and the other is undocumented).

**Esperanza:** Beginning in May (2018), there were some policy changes. The family separation policy of zero tolerance was passed. The US government (USG) now treated parents as criminals – separating children from their parents. These children became part of the (unaccompanied minors) UAC program. Some parents were deported, some parents were voluntarily released with children; oftentimes, the parent was placed in a location different from the child who was placed in an ORR shelter. When USG announced that parents who were reunited in May (2018) had to be reunited, there was a rushed effort to reunite these families. Esperanza has been receiving requests for reunification. There are unaccompanied children still arriving at the border. We have increased staff to handle these requests.

**Q:** Who is giving these additional requests? **A:** Lutheran Social Services and the United Conference of Catholic Bishops have been receiving unaccompanied children through ORR. ORR or ICE makes these additional requests.

**Q:** Who pays for these reunifications?

**A:** It is the US government. Homeland Security- ICE- USCIS. Homeland Security-gives money towards this. People who apply for visas, citizenship (in US)—those fees funds ICE and USCIS.

**Q:** Who pays you?

**A:** Esperanza get grants. We have received money through work with LIRS, and the Vera Institute of Justice. The Vera Institute of Justice has national contract for unaccompanied minors in ORR shelters. Our funding also comes individual donors, and the general Catholic Charities accounts for 1/3 of our budget.

**Q:** What is the definition of unaccompanied child?

**A:** Mike will answer this.

**Esperanza:** Historically, this is an eerie time. I am going to start by going through the ABC of immigration. A- A is for Asylum. Many of our clients come to the US-seeking refuge. Main



classification for asylum- you must prove that you are threatened because of your race, religion, nationality, political opinion or if “member of particular social group”. Let’s go back to “member of a particular social group”. In May 2017, Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued Matter of AB. If you are a woman and a victim of domestic violence, you are no longer qualified to receive asylum here in the US. Within that decision as well, it was also said that if you are fleeing gang violence in your home country, you are no longer eligible to seek asylum. Because of that decision, judges are more confused. It is our duty as attorneys, to explain what the law is and how the law may or not apply to our client. B: B is for Border. As Val explained regarding the surge of unaccompanied minors coming to the US since 2014, an unaccompanied minor (UAC) is under age 18 and is unable to be reunified with a relative here in the US. When people think of borders- typically they think of the US- Mexico borders. But there are land, sea, air borders. The law covers all types of borders. C: C is for Charge. This refers to public charge. If you are seen to be a weight, a drag to US society, once you fail to get public charge within that 5 year period, the (US) government can deport you. There is no talk, discussion for Congress to change the law. Most embassies are now requiring additional documentation- mostly financial in nature- to come to the US. Most of our clients pull financial resources to get to the US. As a result, some family members have difficulty reuniting here in the US. We stick to the fundamentals of the laws- we reach to the law, look deeply into the law, so that we can tell the (US) government, judges of their unlawful incursions into the rights of the individual.

Q: Who is challenging the illegality of what the (US) government is doing?

A: Esperanza is one of the lead legal services challenging the US government. Esperanza has written some opinions, won cases that have led to some change. For example, if one is deported, the government will give you a piece of paper to go to immigration court with a time and date. (In the last 5 years, there have been over 100K cases). The US government has failed to write both a time and date on the piece of paper, hurting cases.

Q: Differentiate because immigration and criminal court.

A: Criminal is criminal and immigration is immigration. If you go to immigration court, you serve time in federal or state custody, but go to federal court to defend your case. Immigration court is civil- you have right to court but no right to attorney. Many of our clients do not have right to attorney.

Q: With zero tolerance, did immigration go to civil to criminal overnight?

A: Civil is walking to border and declaring asylum. Criminal is smuggling, human trafficking.

Q: What is US immigration law?

A: US immigration law is aligned with UN refugee law; we (the US) have signed an international convention. We are not obligated to return someone to their home country if they do not wish.

**Esperanza:** Now, I am going to talk about what we can do. Let me start with the things you can’t do. If you want to hug a child in a shelter, you can’t. The things you can do is what you are



doing tonight- showing up. We are living in a time where the safety of high-profile, undocumented people has been diminished. Politicians will not advocate for these groups. It is important that people like us- US citizens who can vote – show up and vote. The things affecting the day to day life of undocumented individuals is where we can make a difference. In Baltimore, life is better for an undocumented person than that in Frederick which is better than that in VA. In MD, an undocumented person is afforded certain rights- for example, the right to drive- than those in other states. It is important to let politicians know that their constituents are concerned with immigration. Listening to what Bishop Chilton said was important. At Esperanza, we hear from some clients who feel that the US does not care for them. To see people like you supporting them is important. Another important thing is volunteering. At Esperanza, we have over 500 volunteers- volunteer ESOL tutors, attorneys, health care professionals. Lastly, give up your treasure. Grants help, as does private donations and Andrew will talk more about volunteering. My program relies on private donations.

Q: How important is bilingualism for your volunteers?

A: It's not that important.

**Sanctuary Streets:** Thank you for our panelists and those who put in a capital M in movement. Always, someone is affected. Sanctuary Streets started- as a group of immigrants, citizens-friends, acquaintances loosely acquainted. Most of us were concerned about immigrants. This goes back to showing up. In early 2017, we came to the realization to do something. We were in initially a group of 20, meeting from 7-9 in the evening but you know how that goes. ((Laughter))) We deliberated on what action we could take. We responded by organizing a march in south Baltimore. This was in response to a man who had been taken away in an ICE vehicle, away from his family. What came out of this was listening to the most affected, what pervaded was this fear. What happened if you didn't stop at a stop sign and didn't have your driver's license. There was this fear- fear that by going to court for something like a traffic violation- that you could be taken in. The purpose for us was to show up, to bear witness in case something went awry, and help them exercise their rights if need be. Because of our backgrounds -as educators, social workers, we could also inform about what resources were available. In a nutshell, this is how Sanctuary Streets Baltimore formed. That is what we are- we are a concerned group of individuals. We have a hotline for those in need to call us, we have an email system. We have trainings for volunteers, every 2-3 months. We just held a training last week with a similar group in the DC area- Sanctuary DMV. We would like to do more- like "court watching". Here, we might send you to a district building, courthouse – perhaps to take notes on how different judges might treat certain defendants. Every Saturday, in the fall, we go to day laborer sites. We pack lunches, when it gets cold we might take jackets, coats, and we go listen. It helps if you are bilingual but if you only speak English, there are different ways to help.

Q: Has an ICE agent asked for your ID?

A: No. But I can provide information on future trainings if interested in helping.



**AR:** For one of the talking points, we were asked to reflect on immigration moving forward. I am going to talk about this from the perspective of 3 levels. In Baltimore, they established a legal representation fund called Safe Cities. However, in setting this up, there is no guarantee that this is fully sustainable. One action you can do is to call your local politician to sustain this fund. Most of our clients do not have lawyers. We [Sanctuary Streets Baltimore] do not replace lawyers. Also, at the state level, see if you can have a statewide legal representation fund. Another thing to mention addressing immigration at a federal level is the abolishment of ICE. It is an interesting concept. It is leftist, political. In this country, we have a challenge with the word “abolish”. ICE has been around since the early ‘00s. Pre-ICE, immigration matters were under the Department of Justice. When all things were transferred to Homeland Security, all of these institutions fighting immigration were asking money. Ask your politicians if they wish to abolish ICE.

**ERICA:** Thank you all. Please ask some questions. Afterwards, I wish to outline some next steps regarding action.

### **General Q&A**

Q: I heard there was a child detention shelter here in Maryland?

A(Esperanza): There is no detention center for children in Maryland. There are 2 shelters for children- 1 in Crofton and the other location escapes me. They house a relatively small number of separated children but they have (historically) housed unaccompanied minors. Adult detention centers are in Frederick, Howard Counties. Usually, they double as prisons, but they primarily serve as detention centers.

Q: Is there no limit/restriction for detaining someone who is not a US citizen?

A: (Esperanza): Immigration law is civil. When an adult is in detention for immigration, they can request bond. But for children, this is different. If a child is unable to be reunified with a family member here in the US or if the child has a serious illness, this child can in turn enter long term foster care.

(Audience Member): I just wanted to say that I feel heartened- to have citizens go watch, go to a courtroom- this is giving me food for thought.

Esperanza: This is good to hear. The work can be discouraging at times. The biggest power you have is your voice. You are probably working with, living with folks who do not share your sentiments. Always speak up. If you suspect that someone is making an untrue statement, say something. “You should check your information. Go to a website like Migration Policy Institute, UN High Commission for Refugees. Because we have access to information, try to get someone to see the other side. You might get one to question what they are thinking.



(Audience Member): I have been struggling with information. We all know that there is misinformation. It would be helpful to gather information that is accurate.

Sanctuary Streets: I tell folks don't forget your primary sources—the people most affected. There's nothing like listening/talking to someone.

Esperanza: The question I often ask is "how many undocumented people do you know?" The response is one that changes your perspective.

Q: Are there networks of sanctuary?

A: (Sanctuary Streets) I think there's one at St Matthew's but am unsure.

A: (ERICA) There is one (network of sanctuary) at St Matthew's. They will reconvene in the fall. It's an opportunity for sanctuary groups, community groups to sign on to sanctuary—it can include actual sanctuary, serving as public witness.

(Audience member) I think some of the confusion lies in the definition of "sanctuary".

A:(ERICA): I think this(defining "sanctuary") is where some work is needed.

Opportunities for Action:

**ERICA:** We have provided volunteer information for tonight's presenters [Sanctuary Streets Baltimore and Esperanza Center] on a sheet of paper on your chairs. We also left a yellow card on each chair with some opportunities for volunteering. KIND-Kids in Need of Defense-- needs Uber cards, Lyft cards, pharmacy cards. Tahirih has a social media kit for facilitating conversations like this (around family separation, reunification, detention). CAIR Coalition allows for visitation support via attorneys and health care professionals. DC Detention Visitation Network is church based –based in a Lutheran church in Bethesda, MD and does a lot of visitation. We, here, at ERICA have been at the detention center at Jessup- it's quite an experience—with respect public witness and connecting to those who need to be heard/listen.

Thank you to our speakers.

[END]

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*Information for Opportunities for Action*

**To volunteer with Sanctuary Streets, sign up via this link:** <http://bit.ly/sscsvolunteer>  
**or visit their website,** <https://www.facebook.com/sanctuarystreets/>

**To explore volunteer opportunities with the Esperanza Center, visit this page on their website at** <https://www.catholiccharities-md.org/services/esperanza-center/volunteer/>



*Additional Information for Opportunities for Action*

**KIND – Kids In Need of Defense**

<https://supportkind.org/resources/how-you-can-help-end-family-separation-and-ensure-protection-for-children/>

Write a letter to one of our children letting them know that they are not alone and that someone in this country, who they do not know, supports them and their journey. Check out this wonderful TED Talk for inspiration and send your letter to our Baltimore Field Office. <https://youtu.be/LVFVaWCV1TE>

Donate the following in-kind items:

- Uber and/or Lyft e-gift cards, Pre-Paid phone cards, Pharmacy & Store Gift Cards
- Books & School Supplies
- Tickets to events - soccer, baseball, basketball, theater

Elena Martinez Fernandez  
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)  
1800 N. Charles Street, Suite 810  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
(443) 470-9437  
[emartinez@supportkind.org](mailto:emartinez@supportkind.org)

**Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland**

Unaccompanied Children Pro Bono Project

EVERY TUESDAY Consults for Unaccompanied Children  
9:00 AM to 1:00 PM at Baltimore Immigration Court  
Need volunteer interpreters for: August 21, and 28  
Need volunteer attorneys for: August 21 and 28

Training, Malpractice Insurance, Mentorship, and Interpreters provided

Catherine D. Hulme, Esq.  
520 W. Fayette Street, Suite 300  
Baltimore, MD 21201-1756  
443.465.4627  
[CHulme@probonomd.org](mailto:CHulme@probonomd.org)      [www.probonomd.org](http://www.probonomd.org)

**Tahirih Justice Center**

Social Ambassador Toolkit

<https://www.tahirih.org/social-ambassador-toolkit/>

201 N Charles St #920, Baltimore, MD 21201  
[\(410\) 999-1900](tel:(410)999-1900)  
<https://www.tahirih.org/locations/baltimore/>



### **CAIR Coalition**

Jail Visits: no legal background required. Gathering information from detainees to then be passed along to their attorneys, providing detainees with information about their rights, their options, general information about the process. Required training session.

Medical and Mental Health: asylum seekers often need pro bono work of healthcare professionals

Contact:

CAIR Coalition

1612 K St NW #204, Washington, DC 20006

[\(202\) 331-3320](tel:(202)331-3320)

<https://www.caircoalition.org/how-to-help/volunteering>

- For jail visit, translation/interpretation, or detention hotline volunteer opportunities, email [volunteer@caircoalition.org](mailto:volunteer@caircoalition.org)
- For medical and mental health volunteer opportunities, email Michael Lukens at [michael@caircoalition.org](mailto:michael@caircoalition.org)

### **DC Detention Visitation Network**

All volunteer network that visits detainees at the ICE contract facilities at the Howard County (MD) Detention Center in Jessup and the Worcester County (MD) Jail in Snow Hill. Visitor Volunteers must complete an application and one-time DC DVN training program. DC DVN requests the visitor to be consistent in his/her visits with detained immigrants, with interest in making one visit per month for a period of at least 4 months. Pen Pal program also.

<https://dcdetentionvisitation.org/>

[washingtonareadvn@gmail.com](mailto:washingtonareadvn@gmail.com) or call 443-620-3380

River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 6301 River Road, Bethesda, MD, 20817