

Faith Voices for Justice: Faith community calls for a just and humane immigration system

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When President Biden ran for office, he promised to make the immigration system fair, orderly and humane. He said he wished to “undo the moral and national shame of the previous administration.” On his first day in office, he announced sweeping plans to reform decades-old U.S. immigration laws.

But two years later little has changed. Migrants still daily risk death from any number of dangers— lethal exposure to excessive heat or cold, drowning trying to cross rivers, suffocation in semi-trailers, falls from the border wall, outright homicide, and now detention center disasters. Of those who reach here, the vast majority face denial of entry—or even worse, family separation.

Largely because of a lack of good faith efforts on the part of the Republican Congress and a conservative Supreme Court, the President has only been able to deal with this issue via Executive Orders, but even those have disappointed immigrant advocates. He now has finally ended the oppressive Title 42 policy, but the situation at the border continues to be dangerous and untenable for the thousands of migrants trying to enter the US. The UN has criticized Biden’s replacement of Title 42 with Title 8 as a violation of international law:

“Barriers preventing people from exercising the fundamental human right to seek asylum are unacceptable and contrary to States’ international obligations. The new US Government Rule that restricts access for asylum-seekers who arrive irregularly after transiting through another country is incompatible with principles of international refugee law,” said the United Nation’s Refugee Agency and International Migration Organization in a joint statement.

In a very real sense, our immigration system is not “broken,” as we so often hear. It is doing the job our politicians want it to do quite well, namely, to discourage all but the most “desirable” immigrants from even trying to come to the U.S. This despite the fact that our economy runs on immigrant labor, including the undocumented, who lack “papers” but are willing to do the jobs U.S. citizens are not.

We could speak further of all the many contributions immigrants have always made to this nation and the fact that they pay taxes, replace our aging workforce, create small businesses, etc., but that is not our purpose in this letter. Rather it is simply to remind people of faith – all faiths – that all religions teach us that all people are siblings to us, no matter their race, nationality, or economic status. Clearly, this is not the way we should be treating other members of our human family.

We are not calling for “open borders” – no country is bound to accept all those who wish to resettle there to the point its social and economic life is jeopardized. But people also have a right to migrate, and all, migrants and natives, are equal in God’s eyes. We are calling for a system that is humane, and for the U.S. to live up to the international agreements it has been part of for decades,

We call upon our leaders to think about the common good, instead of viewing immigration as a useful “wedge” issue, and we call upon our citizens to reject the politics of fear and demonization and call upon our elected officials to do the same. Lastly, we call upon all faith communities to respond to this moral crisis and become even stronger advocates for our immigrant families.

(for a comprehensive analysis of current immigration policy and the situation at the border, see: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/border-after-title-42>)