

FAMILIES SEEKING FREEDOM

A faith resource—and call to action—in solidarity with immigrant families seeking freedom from fear of family separation, detention, and deportation



CALLED TO LISTEN & GRIEVE AS PARTNERS

In the midst of an unprecedented number of deportations in recent years, renewed ICE raids in recent months, the years-long block of “DACA+/DAPA” programs intended by the President to provide relief to many undocumented immigrants, and the recent tied Supreme Court vote that upholds that block for now, immigrant families are feeling:

“We are devastated, that is our reality.” Ivone

“More than one-third of members in our congregations could have benefited from a positive Supreme Court decision for DAPA & expanded DACA. Now we are heartbroken.” anonymous

***How can faith communities listen to the pain of immigrant families, and grieve with them?**

***How might we move forward in action and hope together?**



A disappointed but determined family outside the Supreme Court on June 23, 2016.

PRAYER: *In such a time of fear, loss, and sadness, be our guide, God—that we might listen carefully to families in pain, mourn collectively, and seek hope together for a future of justice and healing. AMEN.*

BACKGROUND: The President announced 11/20/14 a program that would have allowed undocumented parents of U.S. citizens and of lawful permanent residents to remain in the U.S. and travel and work legally, called the **Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA)** program. He also announced an expansion of the **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)** program for youth who arrived in the U.S. as children. These programs could have temporarily helped as many as 4.5 million people avoid family separation. A Texas federal district court blocked the programs from rollout by a preliminary injunction, and the case was sent to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court’s 4-4 tie vote issued on 6/23/16 means DACA+ and DAPA remain blocked by the Texas court’s injunction. But, **the Supreme Court’s vote does not set a precedent, and is not the final word on DAPA and DACA+.** The case **could be re-heard by the Supreme Court after a 9th justice is in place.**

And, the vote **does not change or challenge the original DACA 2012 program.**

(For more, go to: <https://www.nilc.org/issues/immigration-reform-and-executive-actions/united-states-v-state-of-texas/supreme-courts-tie-vote-means-dapa-daca/> and <http://www.adminrelief.org/resources/item.607141-Questions-and-Answers-about-the-Supreme-Courts-decision-in-US-v-Texas>)

Also, in January and again in May, 2016, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced a “surge” of nationwide arrests. The arrests have focused especially on mothers and children who entered the U.S. after fleeing persecution and violence in Central America, and on unaccompanied Central American minors who now are over 18.

(See: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-deportation-exclusive-idUSKCN0Y32J1>)

Another recent raid targeted males in Midwest states, resulting in 331 arrests over 1 month—and greatly increasing community fear.

(See: <http://thinkprogress.org/immigration/2016/06/21/3790701/immigration-raids-wisconsin/>)

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IMPACTED FAMILIES EXPLAIN THEIR GRIEF

"We are devastated—because we marched, rallied, fasted and waited patiently for over a year for institutions with power to dictate our future to move forward. Our pain and distress is rooted in the reality that, once again, our hopes have been crushed by an establishment we thought we could rely on and one that would hear our appeals." —Ivone

"The day the Supreme Court's DAPA/DACA+ decision came out, I cried on and off for about 24 hours. I had dared to hope that we would win. The next day I felt an intense, yet subtle, numbness throughout my body as I tried to go about my day. My parents on the other hand, the ones most affected by this tie vote, were stronger than I was, as usual. They consoled me, and reminded me that they've been here for 19 years without anything, so this was not a loss. In order to lose something, you first have to have had it—and they've never had anything. They have always been the ones sacrificed in policy because many people believe that since they made the decision to come to the United States without documentation, they don't deserve the chance to be treated as equals, to live without fear." —Diana

"I feel deceived. It's like this: You come to America and....you pay taxes,...you educate your children, you create a business, you employ people and that doesn't count? It's almost like, what does one really have to do to become a citizen?" —Antonio (See his story at: <http://www.vidaenelvalle.com/news/state/california/sacramento/article86312397.html>.)

*The sacrifices, pain, and prayers of immigrant families have been constant.
We hold in our hearts and prayers their stories of courageous faith.*



Rosario's Witness of Strength:

Rosario has not seen her son in 12 years, since she left El Salvador to escape violence and seek a better future for him. As she prays to see him again, she uses her body and soul to seek rights for immigrant families. In October 2015, she fasted nine days, slept in a church, and held daily vigils in front of the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans to urge them to overturn Tx. Judge Hanen's injunction against DAPA and DACA+ so that the programs could move forward. Rosario also walked 100 miles with 100 immigrant women and advocates from a Pa. detention center to DC in September, where she shared the pain of immigrants with the Pope. See: <http://www.latinorebels.com/2015/09/22/100miles100women-a-march-to-d-c-for-immigrant-rights-during-pope-visit/>

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In preparation for prayer and reflection, watch and listen here to Rosario's story, told thru song by "Elena & Los Fulanos" at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeZBqYq98YQ> (Click on cc in the right corner of the video for English sub-titles of the story.)



PRAYER: *May the families of Rosario, Ivone, Diana, all immigrant parents and children we know by name—and the millions yet unknown—feel the comfort of the Spirit, and the solidarity of great Love that calls us to shoulder pain together as one family united. AMEN.*

Immigrant mom Lenka Mendoza (below & on p. 1 top) has marched, fasted, & prayed for days outside the Supreme Court and White House many times to encourage immigrant rights.

The youth at right is a DREAMer who has advocated non-stop for his family to be granted relief from fears.

They are pictured, amid tears, after the Supreme Court's 4-4 tie vote report on 6/23.



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Wilden David Guillen Acosta's Struggle Unites Community

Wilden fled violence in his native Honduras as a 16 year old in summer of 2014. Picked up in Texas, he first appeared before a Charlotte, N.C. immigration judge in January 2015, when the case was continued until March. Then over 18, an attorney advised him incorrectly not to appear again in March, as he was no longer eligible for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. A month later, Acosta was informed the judge ordered him removed from the country. Then in February 2016, Acosta was arrested between 6 & 7 a.m. in front of his parents' apartment in Durham, while on his way to the high school he was set to graduate from this Spring.



Durham's Human Relations Commission has asked ICE officials to stop deporting young people from their city, saying the arrest of him and other young persons has "generated enormous fear among our immigrant...communities, and has also disrupted their school attendance. Read and hear more youth stories at: <http://thinkprogress.org/immigration/2016/04/14/3767955/chilling-effect-immigration-raid-teens/>, <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/local/counties/durham-county/article58256943.html> and <http://abc11.com/news/officials-halt-deportation-of-durham-teen/1254138/>



Elmer & his new son rest after a day of farm work near Asheville earlier this year.

Photo courtesy of Defensa Comunitaria & Companeros Inmigrantes

Teen Becomes Farm Worker to Support Family, Now Targeted for Deportation

Elmer fled sky-rocketing murder rates in his home of Guatemala in summer of 2014, joined his mother near Asheville, N.C., and attended classes for a time there at Erwin High School. He is from an often persecuted indigenous community, and speaks Mam language. To support his family and new citizen child, he also worked in nearby fields. In June, he was picked up by ICE agents when he missed an immigration hearing because he had no money for legal fees, & is now in detention.

ICE's current focus, according to a November, 2014 memo, is to apprehend persons who pose a threat to national security, public safety, or who have been apprehended while unlawfully entering the U.S. Elmer's mother cries, "I'm worried about my son. He is so young."

Read more of his story at: <http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/2016/06/05/immigration-authorities-arrest-young-father-asheville/85448392/> and <http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2016/06/20/faith-leaders-join-family-stop-deportation/86135888/>

"Splitting this family harms us all."

Rev. Hendler-Voss, Land of the Sky UCC

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WHAT DOES OUR FAITH TEACH US ABOUT GRIEF?



REALITY OF GRIEF: Our faith does not REMOVE pain from our lives, but voices for us the reality of heartache and the toll it takes on our hearts and bodies, as in Ps. 6:7: “My eyes grow weak with sorrow.” In the Hebrew scriptures, Abraham “came to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her” (Gen. 23:2) when his wife died. When Jacob died, Joseph “fell upon his father and wept over and kissed” him (Gen. 50:1). Hannah proclaimed her pain publicly, as she “prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly” (I Sam. 1:10). The Gospel of John reminds us that “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) in learning of his friend Lazarus’ death. Paul also speaks of how Priscilla and Aquila “risked their necks for my life” (Romans 16:3), showing honor for the suffering their courage has brought upon them.

PRESENCE OF GOD IN GRIEF: Scriptures likewise demonstrate for us how God can receive our pain, as we hear psalmists frequently raise direct petitions, complaints, & questions (as in “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” in Ps.: 22:1). Sacred texts point to the need for God’s response, in order to endure suffering. God’s listening results in love that seeks to heal sadness in the world. As the Psalmist recognized: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the poor in spirit” (Ps. 34:18). God gives comfort to turn “mourning into dancing” (Psalms 30:11), and promises through Isaiah to “wipe away tears off all faces” (Isaiah 25:8), so that “sorrow and sighing shall flee away” from the weak and discouraged.

CALLED TO SHARE OTHERS’ GRIEF: Because God models responsive and healing love, humans also are called to show compassion for the hurting; recognizing “there should be no division in the body...(for) if one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (I Cor. 12:25-26). The story of Moses in Exodus 17:12 shows this tender care: As Moses’ arms grew tired from holding up his staff to protect God’s people, “Aaron and Hur....held his hands up—one on one side, and one on the other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset.” Proverbs 29:7 teaches that “the righteous are to care about justice for the poor,” the Psalmist urges us to “vindicate the oppressed and suffering” (Ps. 82:3), and Romans 15:2 reminds that “Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, ‘How can I help?’”

HOW CAN WE HELP EASE THE GRIEF OF IMMIGRANT FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS?

- **LISTEN TO AND INTENTIONALLY ENCOUNTER YOUR IMMIGRANT NEIGHBORS!** Give time to those who wish to share their sadness, but never push for details beyond their comfort level to share.
- **TELL THE STORIES** of families who live in fear of separation to others, and counter criticism against immigrants by building awareness of families’ challenges and strengths.
- **SHARE INFO.** about the current Supreme Court’s 4-4 tie vote; why it was discouraging to so many families who have long awaited relief, and yet how it does not affect the original 2012 DACA program, and how the case could be reheard.
- **SHOW UP** at prayer vigils, bring signs, help lead prayers, offer transportation, ask how to help.
- **OFFER SANCTUARY PROTECTION** to a family at risk of separation. See: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/issues/affirm-sanctuary/>
- **HELP** friends defend against raids and notarios, not open doors to ICE, & find good legal aid.

(See helpful info. at: <http://www.adminrelief.org/resources/item.607048> Education and Community Outreach Toolkit for SCOTUS Immigration Announcements & <http://unitedwedream.org/press-releases/united-we-dream-migrawatch-initiative-defends-community-against-immigration-raids/>)



Demonstrating faithful support for families in grief.

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HOW DO IMPACTED FAMILIES HOPE TO MOVE BEYOND GRIEF?

“While we are deeply saddened that DACA plus and DAPA will not move forward for now, we must pick ourselves back up once again—more resilient than ever—to slowly but surely restore the hope that has been broken and remind our communities that setbacks do not define us or our future.

We begin to restore hope when faith communities stand up in support of our immigrant families. —Ivone

*“What people who are trying to keep our parents down don’t realize is that they are trying to bury seeds. By further burying our parents, they are watering the plant that is now their children. And we won’t give up. Our parents taught us not to, and they taught us well. The day will come when our parents—who have sacrificed & risked everything, including their lives, will have the permanent citizenship they have earned. The day will come when all of our families no longer live in fear. **We must keep fighting for protection of all immigrants, and full immigration reform.**”* —Diana

*“There are immigrants from all over the world in the U.S. who want to see comprehensive immigration reform. **This is our opportunity to convince people to vote (and) to educate our community.**”* —Antonio

HOW CAN WE ACT TOGETHER TO HELP ENCOURAGE HOPE BEYOND GRIEF?

- Share these materials with your communities to help them understand the impact—and next steps beyond—the Supreme Court’s announced tie vote on the DAPA/DACA+ programs: http://www.adminrelief.org/resources/item.607048-Education_and_Community_Outreach_Toolkit_for_SCOTUS_Immigration_Announcements
- To help faith communities build ongoing support for persons who could have qualified for programs like the Presidents’ Extended DACA and DAPA, and to ensure that persons who would have been eligible for these programs are not now unjustly treated before the U.S. v. Texas case may be reheard by a future Supreme Court with 9 justices, **gather family stories (if they are comfortable to share), and send to: iguillen@sojo.net or sstanley@dhm.disciples.org.**
- Learn more about families across the country who would have benefited from deferred action through the stories in the Exhibit “**The Faces of DAPA & DACA+**”. Go to: <https://stop-separating-families.squarespace.com/faces> to see faces of impacted families. **Use these photos to ground you as you pray for relief, and TEXT the word JUSTICE to 69866 on your cell in support of them.**
- Help all eligible persons **register to vote**, and **tell your legislators to support protection for all immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, & other vulnerable populations!** Also, **urge candidates to promise support for immigrants!**

(See next page for more action steps.)



**We are not going to stop!
The fight continues!**

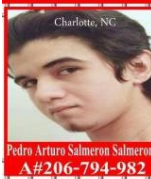


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Call ICE (202) 732-3000



in support of NC Refugee kids
You can use the sample script:
I am calling in support of name... (All.....). These kids fled the violence and threats of the gangs in their countries. If deported they will be in danger and will most certainly face death. They should be allowed to remain with their parents in the United States. Thank you.



If deported they will be in danger and will most certainly face death.

- To ensure children and other vulnerable individuals receive full access to legal counsel & protection programs, **Call Your Senators & Representatives at: 202-224-3121 and urge their support for S. 2540 & H.R. 4646, The Fair Day in Court for Kids Act.** See alert here: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/support-the-fair-day-in-court-for-kids-act/>

- Support Central American youth—including Wilden & others, by calling ICE as directed in the image at left. Act on the IIC Alert to ask the Obama Administration to STOP THE RAIDS against Central Americans:** <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/central-american-migration/>

- For further talking points about Central American migrant youth, see: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/2014/07/24/recent-legislation-on-unaccompanied-children/>.
- Read this further information about Elmer's case: <http://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2016/06/21/journey-young-immigrants-often-ends-deportation/85610304/>
- Join the twitter support for Elmer at: #FreeElmer and #StoptheRaids, and SIGN ON to a petition to show your support at:** <http://action.ndlon.org/p/dia/action3/common/public/index.sjs?action KEY=23064>

As We Seek to Act in Faith, Let Us Remember This Mother's Pain:

Sacred apocryphal writings share the story of a mother of seven, from 2 Maccabees 7:1 & 20:

"It also happened that seven brothers with their mother were arrested and tortured with whips and scourges by the king...Most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance was the mother, who saw her seven sons perish in a single day, yet bore it courageously because of her hope in God."



PRAYER: May we never forget mothers, fathers, and children in agony for their families, hoping to stay together in safety and peace. Give us interest to learn, commitment to build relationships, and courage to act in partnership to build freedom for immigrants among us. AMEN.

**INTERFAITH
IMMIGRATION
COALITION**

Interfaithimmigration.org

We must always
take sides.
Neutrality
helps the
oppressor, never
the victim.
Silence
encourages the
tormentor,
never the
tormented.
— Elie Wiesel

