



MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL of CHURCHES

Tuesday January 31, 2017

“Our Increased Compassion, Not Our Hardened Hearts”

A Joint Letter from Massachusetts Heads of Church on the Executive Action Suspending Refugee Resettlement

We speak together, as Church leaders in Massachusetts, on the injurious Executive Action restricting refugees, issued on Friday January 27, 2017 entitled, “Protecting the Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States.”

Our Christian tradition is clear. Deuteronomy 10:19 commands, “You shall also love the foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” The Holy Family was forced to flee the violence of their homeland (Matthew 2). Our Savior was a migrant. We hear Jesus Christ declare in Matthew 25 that His followers will be judged if we do not welcome the stranger. We stand under that judgment today.

We believe in the aspirations of our nation, a place where all people long to live in safety. We remember with horror our nation’s decision in 1939 to refuse the refugees on the *MS St. Louis*, a ship of German Jews, condemning many to death. Refugees invite our increased compassion, not our hardened hearts.

We echo the words of Bishop Joe Vasquez of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops:

“We believe in assisting all those who are vulnerable and fleeing persecution, regardless of their religion. This includes Christians, as well as Yazidis and Shia Muslims from Syria, Rohingyas from Burma, and other religious minorities. However, we need to protect all our brothers and sisters of all faiths, including Muslims, who have lost family, home, and country.”

We grieve this decision to limit refugees, as it will cause further suffering, not just to our fellow Christians escaping persecution, but all refugees fleeing violence.

As Christians we try to live our lives in accordance with Jesus’ Great Commandment - to love our neighbors as ourselves. We want safe homes, the freedom to worship, stable governments, and opportunities to thrive. Refugees desire the same. Our nation is founded on this welcome. We must make sure that we do not allow fear to overwhelm us, crowd out our compassion, or fundamentally change our character.

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Therefore, we pledge our voices and our churches' active support to resettle refugees in Massachusetts.

We call on elected leaders, including President Trump, to reconsider the Executive Action to limit refugee resettlement.

We have and will continue to welcome and support refugees. Our churches are in every single city and town of Massachusetts.

And, we ask our churches to reach out in love and Christian hospitality to the refugees living near them. We encourage our churches to show compassion and support to those who have fled hardship and violence.

Signed:

- The Rev. Fr. Arakel Aljalian, Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America
- The Rev. Dr. Jim Antal, Minister and President, Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ
- Mr. Anthony Barsamian, President, Massachusetts Council of Churches
- Reverend Howard K. Burgoyne, Superintendent, East Coast Conference, Evangelical Covenant Church
- Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V. Bishop, Roman Catholic Diocese of Fall River
- Reverend Dr. Harold M. Delhagen, Synod Leader/Executive for The Synod of the Northeast, Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar, Bishop, United Methodist Church, New England Conference
- Reverend Laura Everett, Executive Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches
- The Rt. Rev. Douglas Fisher, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts
- The Rt. Rev. Alan Gates, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
- The Rt. Rev. Gayle Harris, Bishop Suffragan, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
- Bishop Jim Hazelwood, New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Reverend Jocelyn Hart Lovelace, Presiding Elder, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Boston-Hartford District
- His Grace Bishop John, Diocese of Worcester and New England, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
- Reverend Mary Day Miller, Executive Minister, The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts
- Noah Merrill, Secretary & Frederick Weiss, Presiding Clerk, New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers)
- Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, Bishop, Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts