

TITLE: PROTECTION OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE:

One of the best loved stories of the New Testament demonstrated the concern that Jesus had for children: “but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs. Let anyone accept this who can.” (Matthew 19: 14-15) He also said “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me: for it is the least among you all of you is the greatest.” (Luke 9: 48) If Jesus valued children and admonished us to treat them well, how can we do otherwise?

HISTORICAL GROUNTINGS:

The United States has a fraught history in its treatment of children. We have made strides in the last 150 years to improve the lot of children but have often taken steps backward at many points along the way. If we reflect on our history of slavery and its destruction of families, the breakup of Native American families through forced boarding schools and out of tribe adoptions, frequent separation of families during the Japanese American internment during World War II, and the more recent attack on families during the era of mass incarceration, it would appear that we Americans have a hard time learning from the past.

The United Church of Christ believing in love for all people just as God loves us, has historically stood up for the rights of the minority against the abuses of the state. Speaking out for people and children who are not in a position to speak out themselves is our natural calling.

TEXT OF MOTION

WHEREAS, Jesus proclaimed the importance of children, how can we do otherwise? “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” (Matthew 18: 5)

WHEREAS, we have ample evidence that the cumulative effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress cause lifelong detrimental results for many individuals by changing their brain architecture so that they may have permanent difficulty in their ability to learn and may develop maladaptive behaviors, experience stress related chronic diseases and engage in destructive habits as adults. As a nation, we cannot justify deliberately placing children on this path.

WHEREAS, multiple national and regional organizations concerned with child welfare have written a letter (Jan. 16, 2018) to Kirstjen M. Nielsen, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, urging the Department “to abandon any plans to systemically separate children from their families absent evidence that a specific parent posed a threat to the safety and well-being of his or her child, as required by the laws of all 50 states.” (1)

WHEREAS, the 1959 UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child include Principle 2 “The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities by law and other means, to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity...” and Principle 6 “The child, for the full and harmonious development of his personality, needs love and understanding. He shall, whenever possible, grow up in the care and under the responsibility of his parents....”

WHEREAS, the history of the United States demonstrates that the forced and government-sanctioned separation of children from their parents, as often occurred to African American children during the era of slavery and also to Native American children who at one time were compelled to live away from their families in boarding schools, results in a multigenerational legacy of trauma.

WHEREAS, as the United Church of Christ, we believe that we must be servants in the service of others and must follow the teaching of Jesus to love one another.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That the Illinois Conference UCC calls the 32nd General Synod of the United Church of Christ to advocate for the Department of Homeland Security to immediately end the practice of separating minor children from their parents, except for the rare cases when the parents pose a threat to their own children, and that minor children who already have been taken from their parents be quickly reunited with them.

Submitted by: The Chicago Metropolitan Association and co-sponsors: Justice and Witness Ministry Team of the Chicago Metropolitan Association and Justice and Witness Ministry Team of the Illinois Conference