

Statement on Child Detention & Family Separation

From Michael Nixon, vice president for Diversity & Inclusion

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(Photo by <http://dreamersnc.com/the-plight-of-undocumented-immigrants-in-healthcare/>)

“For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed. He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 10:17–19

We join the chorus of voices including the [North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists](#) (NAD) and the [Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists](#) (PUC) who have spoken out against the inhumane cruelty being inflicted upon immigrants and refugees—including their children—due to the new “zero tolerance” policy that has been approved by the Executive Branch of the United States and implemented by the Department of Justice.

The implementation of this policy has led to young children being separated from their parents who, in the majority of cases, are political asylum-seekers from countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras among others. Rather than processing those claims, it has been reported that they have been taken into custody immediately while having their children taken

away from them and detained in [chain link enclosures](#) in the McAllen Central Processing Station in Texas.

We have also been deeply troubled by the practice of using Scripture to justify this policy that many have engaged in. There are several examples in Scripture of God commanding us to treat those who are not native to our land in the exact same manner that we would treat a family member.

The book of Ezekiel puts it this way:

“Divide the land within these boundaries among the tribes of Israel. Distribute the land as an allotment for yourselves and for the foreigners who have joined you and are raising their families among you. They will be like native-born Israelites to you and will receive an allotment among the tribes. These foreigners are to be given land within the territory of the tribe with whom they now live. I, the Sovereign Lord, have spoken!” Ezekiel 47:21–23

God calls His people to take an active part in not only welcoming in the foreigner or stranger that is within our gates, but also to make provision for them—treating them as if they are members of our own families.

Our ancestors were brought to this country by way of divergent and varying paths. Some migrated to America and forcibly claimed these lands, which were not native to them, as their own. Others were brought to these shores by force and the foundations of this country were built on the backs of their free labor. Still others sought the dream of a better life in this country fleeing war-torn and impoverished communities in their countries of origin.

Throughout America’s history, it has indeed been the contributions of our global community that has given it the potential to be a great country. If we ignore and invalidate those contributions and allow close-mindedness to close ourselves off from the rest of the world, America as we know it will cease to exist. We cannot and must not turn a blind eye to the needs of those seeking refuge in our country. As their applications for entry are considered, the very least we can do is treat them humanely.

America has always prided itself on being the land of the free and the home of the brave. This is a country where people from all different walks of life are endowed with certain inalienable rights—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. While this ideal has only been true for some, we believe that as people of faith we are called to stand in the prophetic tradition of Martin Luther King Jr. by speaking truth to power and demanding that this country truly live up to the meaning of its creed for all of its inhabitants, as well as for those seeking refuge here.

Ultimately, we are called to treat everyone around us with the love of Christ. That love should motivate us to tangible action. Hebrews implores us to:

“Keep on loving each other as brothers and sisters. Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers,

for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it! Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies.” Hebrews 13:1–3.

I am reminded of a monumental event that occurred on this date—June 19—in 1865. More than two years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Union General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas and announced that the 250,000 remaining enslaved people in the state of Texas were free. Since then, June 19 has been celebrated as “Juneteenth” around the country as a symbol of true emancipation and freedom.

I am also reminded of a boldly prophetic passage that Ellen G. White released around 1855 in “Testimonies for the Church,” Volume One. At the time, slavery was still alive and well in this country and many had questions about how we as Christians should respond in the face of immoral laws and policies. In the face of such questions, particularly as it pertained to the [“Fugitive Slave Act of 1850,”](#) Sister White penned the following passage:

“We have men placed over us for rulers, and laws to govern the people. Were it not for these laws, the condition of the world would be worse than it is now. Some of these laws are good, others are bad. The bad have been increasing, and we are yet to be brought into strait places. But God will sustain His people in being firm and living up to the principles of His word. When the laws of men conflict with the word and law of God, we are to obey the latter, whatever the consequences may be. The law of our land requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey; and we must abide the consequences of violating this law. The slave is not the property of any man. God is his rightful master, and man has no right to take God's workmanship into his hands, and claim him as his own.” Testimonies for the Church, Chapter 37 (201.2).

Andrews University fully denounces the practice of separating families and detaining immigrants and their children in chain-link enclosures. This practice goes against everything that we stand for as a diverse and welcoming community that seeks to help every member of our institution find their voice and value.

As Pacific Union Conference President Ricardo Graham said in their statement “our thoughts and prayers must turn into actions and deeds.” If you’d like to read more about those who are working to support and aid these immigrant families, you can find out more [here](#).

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