

# EVANGELICAL IMMIGRATION table.

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The Wesleyan Church

World Relief

February 28, 2020

Dear Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Wolf:

As you work to protect our nation, please also protect those who are seeking asylum in the United States, including many children who are particularly vulnerable. At present, many children and their families seeking asylum along the U.S.-Mexico border are not adequately protected from either violence or disease. This violates our nation's legal and moral commitments to not return someone with a credible fear back to a situation of potential violence or harm.

U.S. law allows individuals who profess to have a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin to present their case and, if found to meet the standards of our laws, be provided protection in the United States of America. This longstanding commitment to offering refuge to those fleeing persecution is rooted in our history as a nation that welcomes refugees, and for us in the biblical principle that all human beings are made in God's image.

As a nation and as individuals, we are morally obligated to do all that is reasonably possible to protect human life. That does not mean that every individual who seeks asylum qualifies under the law for permanent residence in the United States. But we must offer due process and, throughout that process, treat all people with dignity and reasonable protection, with a particular concern for children and others who are vulnerable. At present, individuals with credible fears of persecution – including many who have fled the authoritarian regimes of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela – are effectively shut out from the possibility of asylum.

As a result of the "Migrant Protection Protocols," tens of thousands of people who would have had their asylum requests considered from within the United States are being required to wait in dangerous border communities in Mexico. Tragically, there have been various credible reports of individuals required to remain in Mexico being victims of kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking and other dangerous situations that sometimes rival the difficult situations from which they initially fled. Some desperate parents have been so concerned for their children's wellbeing in Mexico that they have decided it would be safer for their children to enter the United States on their own, than to risk abuse and even death in Mexico.

Furthermore, because individuals are turned back to Mexico without the administration of appropriate vaccinations, many individuals have become sick while in Mexico awaiting their court hearings in cramped facilities where contagious diseases spread quickly. Others have died of preventable diseases such as the flu while in Customs and Border Protection custody.

We appreciate that Border Patrol agents generally are doing all they can to assist children who have become ill, but we urge you to follow the recommendations of

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the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and of the American Academy of Pediatrics to offer flu vaccinations and other appropriate immunizations at the earliest possible point when asylum seekers interact with Customs and Border Protection officers, to minimize the spread of diseases that, tragically, have proven fatal in some cases.

Ultimately, we hope you will reconsider the Migrant Protection Protocols, which is straining the resources of Mexican border churches and communities. It would be much safer for these families, to be cared for by their extended family members and by local churches throughout the United States while they await their court hearings. Department of Justice records demonstrate that the vast majority of asylum-seeking families released within the U.S. attend all required court hearings.

We also urge you to reconsider the third country asylum bar, which renders individuals ineligible for protection in the United States even when they can prove to the satisfaction of an Immigration Judge that they have a credible fear of persecution if returned to their home country.

U.S. laws rightly both prohibit unlawful entry to the country and offer the promise of protection to those – including vulnerable children – who are fleeing persecution. We must respect the law in both of these regards. We can secure our borders while also respecting due process for those seeking asylum and ensuring that every asylum-seeker is treated humanely and protected from violence while they await the adjudication of their requests. We can also protect public health and save lives by offering flu vaccines and other basic public health protections.

We continue to offer our prayers for wisdom and discernment for you and all those in our government facing difficult decisions on how to lead our country every day.

Sincerely,  
Scott Arbeiter, President, World Relief

Doug Clay, General Superintendent, Assemblies of God USA

Shirley Hoogstra, President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

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