



The Right Reverend Kirk Stevan Smith, Ph.D., D.D.

BISHOP OF ARIZONA

## Pastoral Letter From Bishop Smith

June 22, 2018

Feast of St. Alban

The Bishop Diocesan may deliver, from time to time...a Pastoral Letter to the people of the Diocese....The Bishop may require the clergy to read such a letter to their congregations.\*

--Canon III.12.3

*"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." Matthew 2:18*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Two weeks ago, I wrote in my online E-pistle column about the crisis facing children on the border who were being separated from their parents. Since then, the tragedy has grown in scale, as has the reaction from many faith groups as well as civic and political leaders of both parties. We have all been shocked and saddened by the pain and suffering we have seen our government inflict on innocent children the past few weeks. I do not need to recount the background to this crisis, or update you on the facts, which are best found elsewhere. It is now clear that this is a policy, which is calculated to strike fear into families seeking asylum in this country. It is nothing short of state sponsored child abuse. Although I am grateful that the President has reversed parts of this policy, the crisis still remains. There are still no clear plans to reunite at least 2,000 children who have been separated from their parents. About 60 of them are being held here in Arizona.

No matter your position on the immigration situation, Americans don't take children away from their parents! And Christians don't abuse the stranger in our midst! The Bible is clear on this. You can find it in many passages, such as Jeremiah 22:3-5 – "Do no wrong or violence to the alien." Or more strongly, Deuteronomy 27:19 – "Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien...of justice."

We are fortunate that our own Deacon Rodger Babnew, who is the program group convenor of Cruzando Fronteras, is working daily on the border at Nogales and can give us accurate and up-to-date reports. Families (mostly from Guatemala) seeking asylum must wait to be processed (for more than a week at this point). Most are fleeing gang violence in their own country. Almost always "credible fear" (a determining factor) is established after an interview with a Customs agent. Then the immigrant is referred to an immigration court for a hearing. After that, the family is transported to a shelter in the Tucson area before going to stay with family or friends until it is time for them to appear in court. Some, however, try to cross the border using "alternative, non-legal, methods." It is the children from these families who have been taken. If you'd like to see a more detailed flowchart of the process, go to this link: <http://www.unhcr.org/58a212354.pdf>.

**Pastoral Letter From Bishop Smith**  
**June 22, 2018**

So what can we do?

We can start with the proverbial “write your Congressperson” and insist that we stop such practices and that find humane solutions immediately.

We can include all those suffering, especially children, in our daily prayers at home, and our Sunday prayers at church.

We can support the work of our own diocesan ministry, Cruzando Fronteras, a group of ecumenical clergy and lay folks directly involved on the border and supported by our diocese. Financial support for Cruzando Fronteras can be made through the diocesan Faithstreet campaign:

<https://www.faithstreet.com/campaigns/border-ministry-for-asylum-seekers-the-episcopal-diocese-of-arizona>.

This cruel behavior has grieved my heart more than any other action of our country’s recent history. I am sure it must grieve the heart of Jesus. No one can listen to those tapes of children crying for their mothers or see pictures of toddlers behind wire fences and not be moved. This is not who we are as a nation, or as the people of God. We can’t complacently sit by while parents are weeping for their children and children for their parents.

I invite you, for God’s sake, to speak out, and to act.

Faithfully,



The Rt. Rev. Kirk Steven Smith  
Bishop

*\*This letter may be read this Sunday, June 24 or next Sunday, July 1, or distributed in the form of a hard copy available to parishioners on Sunday morning.*