

**A Statement and Response from Church Leaders in Ottawa County
to Immigration Enforcement in Our Country**

See the video and join us by signing the petition online here: <https://c.org/GG8sZYyfvQ>

First, we want to say that as pastors and faith leaders we are feeling the inner turmoil that many of those in our community are describing. Many places in our world feel bleak, we grieve the suffering we see unfolding in our own communities, and we long to find faithful responses to the pain and violence around us. *"Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13).*

We commit to listening to the voices and experiences of those most impacted by the current enforcement efforts of ICE. We must honor the story of those currently most affected by the actions of our government and respond in ways that will help them. *"I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me" (Matthew 25:43).*

We support the work of the various Indivisible chapters, Lighthouse Immigrant Advocates, and other community organizations. We urge partnership with all people in our communities, especially those directly impacted by immigration enforcement. We encourage people of faith to find ways to embody God's desire for our world, to see that love of neighbor requires action at this time. We affirm that all things on this earth should be intended for the flourishing of all humanity. *"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).*

We call on those with power in our government and our communities to reject the path of violence and to resist narratives that rely on fear to divide us from one another. We explicitly reject the brutality of current immigration enforcement practices and urge the immediate withdrawal of federal forces from local communities until a reformed system with capable and properly trained individuals can take on this work. We urge the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners and Ottawa County Sheriff's department to publicly refuse to participate in or support the current model of federal immigration action in our local community. *"Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).*

We believe that all of these commitments are not partisan choices, but faithful responses to the gospel. This is a moment when faithfulness demands "political" action in the "polis" – community – that we share, heeding God's call to build Beloved Community in the midst of this brokenness. *"God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 2:18b-19)*

We follow the path of Jesus who invites us to join him in standing against the forces of unjust power in our own time. This means refusing to mirror the violence we oppose, even as we remain steadfast and courageous in confronting injustice. We are called to discern the difference between human beings made in God's image and the destructive systems that ensnare them. In the midst of this turmoil we continue to be guided by the faithful witness of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: *"I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant."*

The witness of the church in our own time requires us to join Christ in standing with the vulnerable, in seeking the healing of those caught up in systems of oppression (including ourselves, the perpetrators of violence, and the victims of violence), to provide safety in our pews and in our communities, and to go out into the world as a presence that insists on change in our own time through resistance to the violence that rises around us. *“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).*

If you are looking for steps you can take to respond to the current realities in our community and our country, we would point to the following options:

- **Study what Scripture and the tradition teach** about exiles, strangers, immigrants, and hospitality—for example, texts like Leviticus 19:33–34, Hebrews 13:1–3, and Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 25 —so that your engagement is grounded in the actual, faithful heart of our tradition.
- **Listen to the witness and experience** of those who are vulnerable. Listen to those on the ground in Minnesota and other places who are on the front lines of this moment. In particular, we commend the work of the Immigrant Defense Network (<https://immigrantdefensenetwork.org/>), ministries encouraged by Episcopal Bishop Craig Loya (<https://episcopalmn.org/>), and the testimony of Patty O’Keefe and Brandon Siguenza (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Inn-sfiMcyE>)
- **Engage in intentional, compassionate conversations** with people whose perspectives differ from yours (especially those who fear or misunderstand immigration) so that bridge-building and truth-telling can happen in your community.
- **Disrupt and protest unjust immigration practices.** This includes showing up for organized, nonviolent actions led by trusted community groups, participating in “Rapid Response to ICE” trainings like those offered by Indivisible on the Lakeshore, supporting court accompaniment and rapid-response networks, and standing in public witness alongside immigrant-led organizations such as Lakeshore Immigrant Advocates and local Indivisible chapters.
- **Support efforts toward restorative justice and accountability.** Participate in “Know Your Rights” Training and connect with groups like Lakeshore Immigrant Advocates, finding ways to support their work, help shoulder their burden, and care for them as they do the work of Jesus in our time. Connect with your local Indivisible chapter to find more ways to take concrete action.

Clergy Signatories

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