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[Acts of Faith](#)

From pulpits across America, sermons condemn separation of immigrant families

By [Julie Zauzmer](#) June 19 at 6:00 AM



A 4-year-old Honduran girl carries a doll while walking with her immigrant mother, after both were released from detention, from a Catholic Charities relief center to a nearby bus station June 17 in McAllen, Tex. (Loren Elliott/AFP/Getty Images)

[We asked religious leaders:](#) How are you talking to your congregations about the separation of immigrant parents from their children on the U.S.-Mexico border?

Dozens told us about the sermons they delivered in their churches on Sunday, and at their synagogues this Shabbat. Many said they typically avoid politics in their preaching, but this week they felt compelled to speak out.

Here is a selection of their responses, ranging across the country and many denominations.

Pastor Robert Franek preached at Faith Lutheran Church, a mainline Protestant church in Galesburg, Ill.: “In just six weeks from mid-April through May, some 2,000 children have been separated from their parents and placed in detention centers. This immoral and unconscionable policy is being justified by a twisting of scripture by those who know neither the biblical imperative to treat the foreigner with compassion and love nor the Constitution that protects the basic human rights of all people. Asylum seeking is not a crime. ... This barbaric practice of taking a nursing infant out of her mother’s embrace should alarm us all. There is no defense for this, not in the Bible, the Constitution, or international law. ... Look around. Christ is present in the stranger who comes to our country. Look around. Christ is present in the eyes of the innocent children. Look around. The kingdom of God is here!”

Pastor Stan Cardwell preached at Community United Methodist Church, a mainline Protestant church in Crofton, Md.: “Make no mistake – no matter where you stand on immigration, what we are doing to children and families in the name of the law is evil. And we, as Christ followers, have a moral responsibility to speak and stand against evil. You cannot remain silent.”

[*\[Why many white evangelical Christians are not protesting family separations on the U.S. border\]*](#)

Chris Scott preached at The Exchange, a Mennonite church in Winchester, Va.: “As people of faith, we are bound to the law of love. What is legal is not always what is moral. And what is moral is not always what is legal. ... What does love require of us? Love does not require that families be torn apart, with babies yanked from their mothers. We must follow love. I am so saddened by the faith that I hold to and the Bible that I cherish being used to support causes so clearly outside the law of love and the way of Christ.”

Rabbi Elliott Perlstein preached at Ohev Shalom, a synagogue in Richboro, Pa.: “As a rabbi, it is not in my purview to comment on Mr. Sessions’s usage of his verse from Romans. I would choose to quote from Deuteronomy 16:20 which Jews and Christians share in common: ‘Justice, Justice shall you pursue.’ Who can claim that taking an innocent child from a parent’s arms is just? The great prophets of Israel spoke truth to power, as did the prophet Nathan even to King David when necessary. ... We Jews have too often been the victim of unjust governments and laws. We have a special responsibility to heed the words of the Prophet Isaiah ‘to be a light unto the nations.’”

The Rev. Douglas Koesel at Blessed Trinity Catholic Church in Cleveland, said: “We will be asking our congregation to call Senator Rob Portman’s office to denounce from the Senate floor the inhumane, illegal, emotionally harmful and cruel abuse of children for political ends. We will give them five possible office numbers to call and will wait while everyone calls.”

[*\[The verse Jeff Sessions cited was historically used to justify slavery\]*](#)

Pastor Terry Yasuko Ogawa preached at Congregational Church of Pinehurst, a mainline Protestant church in North Carolina: “America is you and me. This is being done in our name. But if yanking families apart to incite fear of seeking a better life is being done in our name, then God give us the strength to say ‘Not in our name!’ and arise to speak God’s truth of love to power. Lord, this is a season where it would be so easy to shrink back in fear, throw our hands up, say the world is going to hell. But only if

we let it. The world is made up of people like you and me. We have the ability to speak up in the name of justice, to love, to nurture, to bridge difference.”

Pastor Constance Day preached at New Day Lutheran Church, a mainline Protestant church in Idaho Falls: “I don’t really want to get political in church, but when politicians use our holy book to justify evil acts—quoting the parts of the Bible that they want to, and conveniently leaving out the parts they do not want to hear—it’s appropriate for us to speak up and say that they are wrong.... It’s not hard to find the many admonitions in the Bible about treating foreigners fairly, and loving neighbors as oneself. It’s not hard to find the heart of the Bible, and the heart of God.”

Rabbi David Siff at Temple Torat Emet in Boynton Beach, Fla., emailed his congregation: “The Torah wants us to help people find refuge, and help them create thriving, dignified lives. It is disturbing to me as both a scholar and religious leader when ‘Bible’ is used to justify insensitivity and cruelty. May our leaders find ways of helping all humans around the world create safe, dignified lives.”

The Rev. Joe Genau preached at Edgewood Presbyterian Church, a mainline Protestant church in Birmingham, Ala.: “Our government cannot justify the way these families are being treated, and for people of faith, resistance must be given. And when our leaders use my tradition’s holy scriptures to do so, a stern rebuke is in order.”

Rabbi Asher Knight preached at Temple Beth El, a synagogue in Charlotte: “We are also a people of immigrants, and a people who have held high the value of intact families. This is not an abstract matter for us. Our Jewish story is fundamentally an immigrant story. We know, too well, what it was like for our children to be ripped from our hands and put into camps. No matter how many generations we have been here – no matter how many thousands of years ago the Exodus took place – the timeless call to care for the stranger still compels us. We have a choice on how we want to be remembered. Do we want to stand at the border, rip children from their parents, and tell the families to turn around and go into a burning building? Or do we want to value people as humans, reject the hostile attitude in which one generation of immigrants would slam the door securely shut behind themselves, and from behind that closed door make self-righteous and hateful pronouncements about what America stands for? Xenophobic hatred, cloaked in a veneer of warped pseudo-biblical patriotism, makes a mockery of American and Jewish values both.”

This post has been updated.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/06/19/from-pulpits-across-america-sermons-condemn-separation-of-immigrant-families/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a2b3051839c9