



Peace & Justice Journal

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As Jesus hung on the cross, dying, he said, “I am thirsty.” Someone soaked a sponge in a jar of wine vinegar and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. Jesus responded with the words, “It is finished” (John 19:28–30).

In the Bible, thirst is often connected to a desire for what is good or just—for righteousness. The passage in John references Psalm 69:21 which reads, “For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Have you ever thirsted for something and been given the exact opposite?

Psalm 69 begins, “Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck . . . I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.” The Psalmist describes an overwhelming situation where he is drowning in agony but cannot find help.

As the U.S. becomes increasingly hostile toward immigrants, many of us are feeling overwhelmed and thirst desperately for justice. Read on to learn more and consider how you might respond. —*Saulo Padilla*

“For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” (Psalm 69:21)

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A water barrel for thirsty travelers near
Falfurrias, Texas. MCC photo/Galen Fitzkee



Thirsting for justice

A water station managed by Humane Borders in the Arizona desert. MCC photo/Saulo Padilla

I have been visiting the Mexico-U.S. border regularly for 17 years. During each visit I've encountered migrants seeking safety (safety-seekers). Safety means many things: food, water, shelter, health, work, education.

Many migrants wait for agonizing months or years in extremely precarious circumstances to cross the border. As in the Psalm, their throats are parched from pleading their case, from asking for their humanity to be recognized.

Since 2001, the remains of more than 10,000 migrants coming to work on our farms and in our factories, asking for safety and a better future, have been found along our southern border. As I visit the graves of unidentified migrants, I consider how their families will never know where their lives ended. There is a mother, a father, a brother, a sister still waiting to hear back from a loved one. How long would it take you to forget a missing child, sister or parent?

The militarization of the U.S. side of the border, including the construction of border walls, has pushed migrants into more remote and dangerous desert terrain. Policymakers consider it a deadly natural deterrent, driving people to places so remote that they die of thirst, heat, and cold. Where, when their remains are found, only a skull or a femur is left. Where they encounter the sour taste of xenophobia and racism.

Meanwhile, our politicians craft narratives that increasingly negate the humanity of the *other*, using terms such as *animals* and *barbarians* to strip safety-seekers of any personal quality that could evoke compassion and empathy. Such narratives have created an enormous sense of fear and hate in U.S. communities. Safety-seekers then encounter a population who despise and reject them without reason. As the Psalmist wrote in verse 4, "Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause."

The Psalmist continues in verses 20–21, "I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

Those seeking refuge ask us to protect them. Instead, we close our doors. We give them the sour taste of refugee bans and closed borders.

Those who make it to the U.S. and live in our communities drink every day the sour taste of fear. Fear of deportation, of detention, of being separated from their family. Even those who have called the U.S. home for decades live with the sour taste of uncertainty every day.

In Mathew 5:6, Jesus invites us to partake in a righteous thirst: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied." Are you thirsty? I am thirsty. Because

I know firsthand how welcome and hospitality can quench thirst and hunger.

I have experienced the embrace of the church. I am the son of a refugee. An immigrant. I am a Guatemalan citizen, a Canadian citizen and a legal permanent resident in the United States.

When my family arrived in Canada in 1986 as a family of refugees, we felt the embrace of First Hispanic Mennonite Church in Calgary. The church became a place where people cried with us, became our translators, and fed us warm meals. It was a church that didn't want to change or assimilate us but wanted to worship God in our mother tongue. A church that served us the cup of justice we needed. It was also the church where I was given opportunities to grow and see myself in roles of leadership.

If you met me 34 years ago, I might have appeared as the young immigrants we see in the news today, as those we are told to fear. Crossing borders with my mom to find my dad, I couldn't speak English. It was the opportunities I found in the church that led me to feel safe and valued.

My invitation today is for you to partake in the work of God to seek justice. Let us work together to serve a cup of justice that will quench thirsts. —Saulo Padilla

Policy changes: A campaign of cruelty and chaos

Beginning in January, President Donald Trump signed a slew of executive orders designed to reduce all immigration and ramp up cruelty towards immigrant populations. Orders have targeted birthright citizenship, ended asylum access, and effectively halted refugee resettlement.

While court challenges remain, the legal status of more than 2 million people, including those with humanitarian parole and temporary protected status, is in jeopardy. Another policy change lifted guardrails on enforcement inside churches, schools and hospitals.

These “shock and awe” tactics overwhelm advocates and instill fear in immigrant communities.

The administration boasts its cruelty with images of detainees being handcuffed, perp-walked, and taken to harsh detention centers. Chilling videos show student activists arrested by plain-clothed, masked agents. While officials claim they are focused on deporting violent criminals and gang members, the evidence shows they are casting a much wider net.

In March, Trump invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, a war-time authority last used to justify the detention of people with Japanese,

German, and Italian ancestry during World War II. At least 75% of those arrested under the law in March and deported to a maximum-security prison in El Salvador do not have any apparent criminal record. Those with convictions were for mostly minor offenses.

None were afforded due process.

These actions push the limits of executive authority. Judges are pushing back but, with some of their orders being ignored, the U.S. may be headed for a constitutional crisis.

Amidst the torrent of political changes, people of faith are responding. More than 450 attended an MCC webinar in February (mcc.org/immigrant-neighbors). In March, Anabaptist faith leaders from Pennsylvania and young adult MCC Peace Camp participants visited Congressional offices. In April, Mennonite Church USA leaders came to Washington to call for assurances against enforcement operations in houses of worship.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed, but important that we continue to respond. Below are a few suggestions. Every small action counts!

- **Join Mennonite Action** as they make the case that “God’s Love Knows No Borders” (mennoniteaction.org).



Saulo Padilla, MCC U.S. Migration Education Coordinator, holds a know-your-rights “red card” at a church in Philadelphia. Photo courtesy of Saulo Padilla

- **Email, call, and meet directly with** your members of Congress (npjm.mcc.org).
- **Attend town halls:** In April, a constituent of Senator Chuck Grassley passionately prodded him about welcoming the stranger (youtube.com/watch?v=gbfPt8o8h5A).
- **Be creative.** Think outside of the box. Find new ways to connect with community members and influence elected officials.

Find more ideas and resources at mcc.org/immigrant-neighbors
—Galen Fitzkee

“Amidst the torrent of political changes, people of faith are responding.”



MCC staff pray at a memorial in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, in Mexico. MCC photo/Saulo Padilla.

Worship resources

Prayer

by Saulo Padilla

We walk with our brothers and sisters in desolation.

Are you here God?

Please don't be far.

We are afraid and our souls are trembling.

You cried in Gethsemane, come cry with us.

Many hunt for us and we are accused of breaking the law;

You have been persecuted, come be our witness, defend our cause.

Make known the roots of our suffering and the causes of our journey.

Make public that our intentions are in accord to your law.

Intercede for those who walk with us in this path.

Make their rights be known, and their voices be heard.

Anxiety and fear are our companions in our journey;

replace them with peace and hope.

Nurture our spirits while we are far from home.

Be with our loved ones.

Christ, you have been a migrant, you have been exiled.

Come walk with us, and bring justice and peace into our lives.

Restore the lands of our ancestors.

Bring justice to our people.

Pour rain on their crops, and give them peace to harvest their fruit,

so they don't have to migrate and leave their homes.

And if we have to return, we will be able to sustain our families.

God, give us the courage to advocate for just laws.

As you did for Pharaohs and

Kings in antiquity,

soften the hearts of lawmakers today,

so that the laws will be in accord with your law.

Amen.

Scripture readings

John 19:28–30

Psalms 69

Matthew 25:31–46

Prayer of the farm workers' struggle

by Cesar E. Chavez, founder, United Farm Workers

Show me the suffering of the most miserable;

So I will know my people's plight.

Free me to pray for others;

For you are present in every person.

Help me take responsibility for my own life;

So that I can be free at last.

Grant me courage to serve others;

For in service there is true life.

Give me honesty and patience;

So that I can work with other workers.

Bring forth song and celebration;

So that the Spirit will be alive

among us.

Let the Spirit flourish and grow;

So that we will never tire of the struggle.

Let us remember those who have died for justice;

For they have given us life.

Help us love even those who hate us;

So we can change the world.

Amen.

chavez.cde.ca.gov

IMPORTANT ADDRESSES

Senator _____

U.S. Senate

Washington, DC 20510

(202) 224-3121

senate.gov

Representative _____

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

(202) 224-3121

house.gov

President Donald Trump

The White House

Washington, DC 20500

(202) 456-1111

whitehouse.gov/contact

GET INVOLVED!

- Check out our website at npjm.mcc.org. Sign up to receive **action alerts** and the monthly **E-Memo**.
- Download your advocacy toolkit at mcc.org/advocacy-toolkit-us
- Follow us on Instagram ([instagram.com/mccpeace](https://www.instagram.com/mccpeace)) and TikTok ([@mccpeace](https://www.tiktok.com/@mccpeace))

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All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.



Facts & figures: immigration

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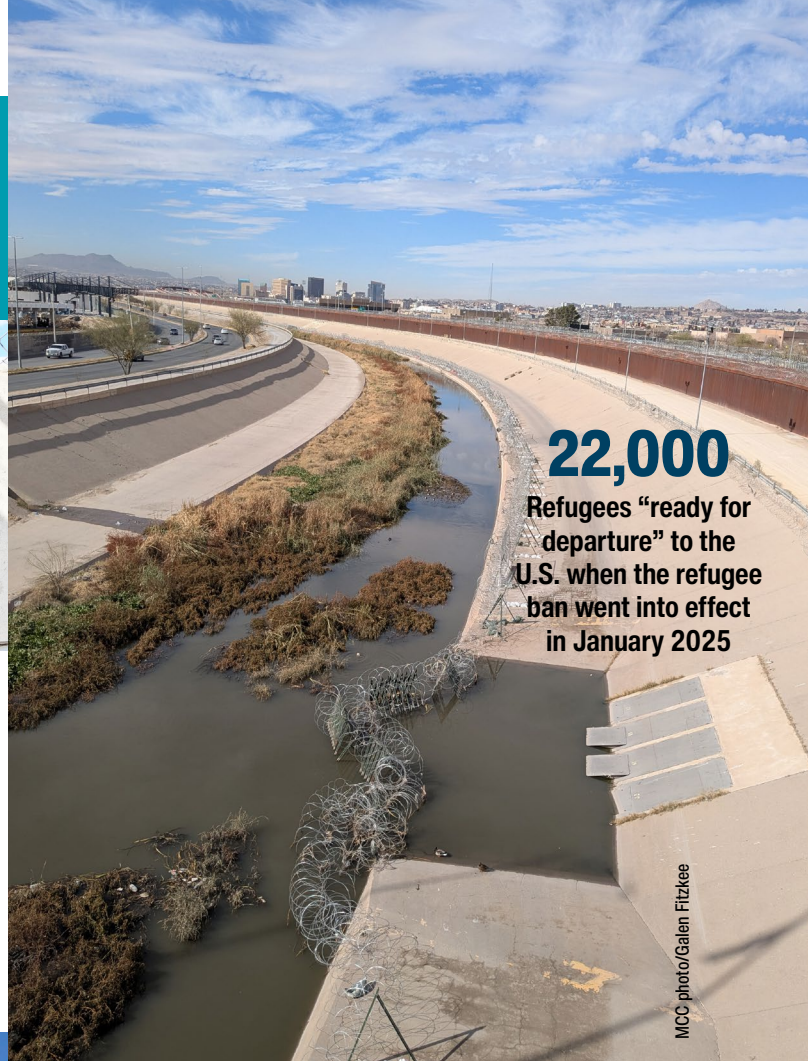
Percentage of people
who want to move
permanently to
the U.S. who can
do so legally



MCC photo/Galen Fitzkee

22,000

Refugees “ready for
departure” to the
U.S. when the refugee
ban went into effect
in January 2025

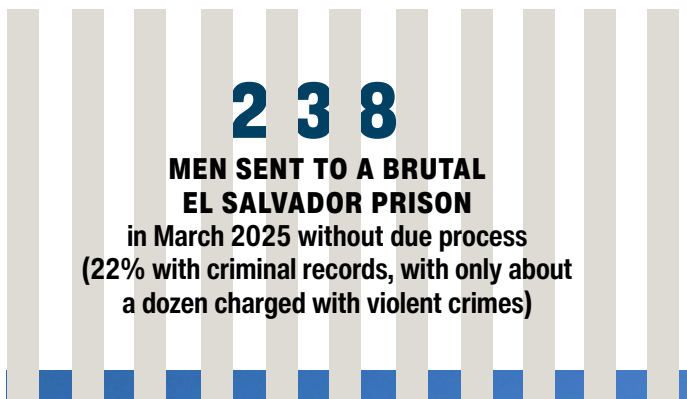


MCC photo/Galen Fitzkee

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**MEN SENT TO A BRUTAL
EL SALVADOR PRISON**

in March 2025 without due process
(22% with criminal records, with only about
a dozen charged with violent crimes)



123 million

(UNHCR)

people worldwide forcibly displaced
from their homes (2024)



MCC photo/Saulo Padilla

10 million

Christian immigrants in the U.S. who are vulnerable
to deportation (includes those with no legal status as
well as those with a status at risk of being withdrawn)



MCC photo/Galen Fitzkee



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Central
Committee**

Sources: CATO Institute; CBS News; Church World Service;
UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency; U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops

Policy Principles

U.S. immigration policy should . . .

Resources for learning more

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

mcc.org/immigrant-neighbors

Interfaith Immigration Coalition

interfaithimmigration.org

National Immigrant Justice Center

immigrantjustice.org

National Association of Evangelicals

nae.org/topics/immigration

Church World Service

cwsglobal.org/tag/refugees

Fund welcome and reception programs

Annual appropriations bills should include robust funding for welcome and reception programs like the Refugee and Entrant Assistance Account, the Shelter and Services Program, and the Case Management Pilot Program so that newcomers and the communities that welcome them have the resources they need to thrive. Investment in these programs builds economic prosperity, housing security and wellbeing.

Address the root causes of migration

The best way to sustainably reduce migration is to address the root causes forcing people to flee their homes. **The U.S. should examine its own foreign policy and eliminate policies that contribute to instability around the world.** Illicit sales and trafficking of U.S. guns fuels violence in Latin America. Broad economic sanctions on countries like Cuba and Venezuela have limited economic growth in the region.

Restore legal immigration pathways

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has been a lifeline for those unable to return to their home country. Similarly, access to asylum, humanitarian parole, and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) allows people to find safety and security in the U.S. **These legal immigration pathways should be restored as one strategy to reduce unauthorized border crossings and welcome migrants in need of a stable home.**

Provide pathways to citizenship

Instead of mass arrests and deportations, U.S. policy should provide reasonable pathways to citizenship for immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for years and contribute to our society and economy. **The Dream and Promise Act would provide one such pathway to citizenship for Dreamers and TPS holders.** A broader legalization bill could provide undocumented immigrants who live and work in the U.S. a chance to get on a pathway to legal status and eventual citizenship.

Protect “sensitive locations”

Immigration enforcement actions in sensitive locations, such as places of worship, schools, and hospitals undermines ethical principles and deters individuals from attending church and from seeking medical care, education and legal assistance. **Congress should pass the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act to uphold the dignity of all people and affirm the role of religious institutions as places of refuge and community support.**



*Barbed wire along the shore of the Rio Grande River from Matamoros, Tamaulipas, in Mexico.
MCC photo/Galen Fitzkee*



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