



Friday, November 20, 2015

A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE GOOD PEOPLE OF THE MICHIGAN AREA

Dear Friends,

My heart is breaking over the terrible and tragic attacks that have recently taken place around the world. My prayers are for all those whose lives are impacted by the constant threat of violence and terror.

In the wake of attacks this past week, more than half of our country's governors have called for a pause to the resettlement of Syrian refugees and legislation continues to be introduced that would limit or stop the Department of State's resettlement. I am disappointed by this reaction from our elected officials. These statements and actions are harmful to refugees, misleading to Michigan's citizens, and only further the fear and terror perpetuated by extremist groups. The screening process to enter the U.S. as a refugee is comprehensive and rigorous.

The world is a dangerous place. Thousands of innocent people are attempting to flee violence, hatred, and extremism. Even "pausing" our refugee resettlement, I believe, will make the world a more dangerous place. Recent United Nations statistics tell us that three quarters of the Syrian refugees who are waiting to enter the U.S. are women and young children. As Christians we are called to welcome the stranger and to pay special attention and care to the widow, orphan, and foreigner – the most vulnerable members of our human family. As United Methodists, our Book of Resolutions reminds us that "Jesus fully identifies with the sojourner to the point that to welcome the sojourner is to welcome Jesus himself. (Matthew 25:35) Jesus teaches us to show special concern for the poor and oppressed who come to our land seeking survival and peace."

Standing on the cusp of Advent, we are reminded that Jesus and his parents fled to Egypt to escape the violent regime of Herod. It is with this tradition of compassion and hospitality in my heart that I encourage you to respond in the following ways:

- Join me in calling our elected officials to welcome the resettlement of Syrian refugees in our nation and in our state. You can contact Senator Stabenow, Senator Peters, and your congressional representative by calling the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121. You can call Michigan Governor Snyder's office at 517-373-3400.

Please share this message:

“As a United Methodist living in [City], I support the resettlement of Syrian refugees in my state. I urge (Senator / Representative/ Governor) to represent me and other constituents who seek to welcome Syrian refugees.”

- I also encourage you and your congregations to consider supporting the resettlement of refugee families in the coming year. You can learn more by attending an informational meeting organized by the Detroit Renaissance District and the Refugee Department of Lutheran Social Services of Michigan on December 9 at 10:00 am at Newburg United Methodist Church (36522 Ann Arbor Trail Livonia, MI 48154). LSSM Staff will share the current state of refugee resettlement and how congregations can assist in the effort. A summary of this meeting will be posted on MichiganUMC.org. Please RSVP to Rev. Paul Perez (pperez@detroitconference.org) if you plan to attend.

In the gospels Jesus says, “Do not be afraid!” We as Christians can guide the world to live in hope, rather than fear, and welcome refugees into our communities and our lives.

Blessings and peace to you all,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah L. Kiesey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the last letter.

Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey
Michigan Area