

LOUISIANA INTERCHURCH CONFERENCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

September 23 – 24, 2019

LIC Statement on Vast Expansion of Immigrant Detention in Louisiana

Because of our commitment to upholding the dignity of human life and our recognition that redemption and forgiveness are core principles of our Christian faith, at the Fall 2016 Annual Meeting of the Louisiana Interchurch Conference LIC members passed a unanimous resolution in support of policy efforts to reduce our state's high rates of incarceration. We welcomed with great joy the news earlier this year that the total number of persons imprisoned in Louisiana in 2018 was almost 19 percent lower than its peak in 2012.ⁱ

However, our relief and gratitude that our state has begun to reduce the number of Louisianans sent to prison soon turned to shock and disappointment when we learned that newly empty prison beds are now being used, through local parish government agreements with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, to detain vast numbers of immigrants.ⁱⁱ Many of these immigrants are asylum seekers who requested refugee at our nation's southern border or long-time residents ensnared in ramped-up ICE enforcement efforts, including fathers and mothers recently arrested at massive worksite raids in Mississippi. The parish governments that have contracted with ICE to detain immigrants are located in areas of the state distant from the love and support of detained immigrants' families and communities as well as immigration attorneys, who are essential in assisting immigrants negotiate our nation's daunting and complex immigration legal system.

As faith leaders we have a duty and responsibility to call attention to the moral consequences of actions which political leaders take in our name. By agreeing to participate in ICE's vast expansion of immigrant detention in our state, it saddens us to say that Louisiana parish government officials may be denying asylum seekers meaningful opportunities to request asylum and contributing to the separation of hard-working immigrants from their families.

For the parish governments that have contracted with ICE to detain immigrants, we pray that you recognize how the location of your facilities, far away from established immigrant communities, makes attorney and family visits extremely difficult. We ask that you please work to provide the most generous visiting hours possible for family members and attorneys, allow attorneys to make copies of legal documents at your facilities, and ensure reasonable costs for phone calls and commissary items. We also ask that you consider the following questions that go to the heart of the important work of law enforcement agencies: How does a parish sheriff office's involvement in detaining persons who lawfully requested asylum at our country's southern border fulfill your mission as a law enforcement agency to protect and serve your local community? Many of the parents swept up in recent immigration enforcement actions have been living, working, and contributing to the life of our communities for decades.

We hope and pray parish government leaders will reconsider their involvement in detaining immigrants and instead re-focus their time and talent on the noble mission of law enforcement work, to serve and protect local communities.

ⁱ Toohey, G. (2019, June 27). Louisiana sees large drops in prison population a year after historic criminal justice reforms. *The Advocate* at https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/crime_police/article_a5c01e10-7ad9-11e8-856e-ebf326bf26bc.html

ⁱⁱ Lanard, N. (2019, August 22). Congress told ICE to detain fewer people. Instead it keeps adding private prisons. *Mother Jones* at <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2019/08/congress-ice-louisiana-mississippi-private-prisons/>