

# Ending Family Detention

## Faith Resources for Mother's Day 2015



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# Ending Family Detention

## Faith Resources for Mother's Day 2015



On Mother's Day we honor the special role of motherhood in our families. Our mothers perhaps make the most impact on our childhood in shaping how we are raised and who we become. This Mother's Day we are paying special attention to the crisis we face in regards to mothers and children held in immigration detention facilities.

In response to many people fleeing violence in Central America and seeking refuge in the United States, the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) opened detention centers to hold mothers and their children facing deportation back to the countries they fled. Over a thousand mothers and children are now held in these centers in Texas and Pennsylvania .

Family detention is inhumane and inappropriate. The mothers, babies, toddlers and teens held there face limited access to legal services, a lack of enforceable standards, insufficient oversight, and inadequate medical care. There is simply no humane way to detain families.



<http://ww2.hdnux.com/photos/35/32/52/7711377/3/628x471.jpg>

Family detention not only places children in a prison-like environment, it puts multitudes of stress on mothers who have to try and keep their family healthy and together under such trying circumstances. The time is now to tell President Obama and Congress to protect the vulnerable and welcome the stranger by ending the practice of family detention. Please consider highlighting the struggle of immigrant mothers and their children in detention in your worship services on Mother's Day.

# Stories From Mothers In Detention



## Mothers Fasting in Faith

During Holy Week, 80 women at the Karnes Immigration Detention Center in Karnes, Texas engaged in a hunger strike in protest of their unjust situation and the effects that family detention has had on them and their children. Some have continued their strike in the weeks since. More than 500 immigrant women and children are being detained at Karnes. Some have been detained for as long as 10 months.

Most of the families detained by ICE are seeking protection and have been found by U.S. government adjudicators to have a credible fear of persecution. Almost all the mothers in detention have family in the U.S. they were trying to reach when they were apprehended.

There have been numerous reports of abuse, mistreatment, and denying children essential medical care. Despite their detention, the mothers at Karnes are resolute. They delivered a letter to ICE which in part read:

**"During this time, no mother will work in the detention center, nor will we send our children to school, not will we use any services here, until we are heard and approved: we want our FREEDOM."**

Pray for these strong and prophetic mothers and others like them as they continue to fight for the freedom and health of themselves and their children.



**Sources:** [http://colorlines.com/archives/2015/03/why\\_mothers\\_are\\_on\\_strike\\_at\\_karnes\\_immigrant\\_detention\\_center.html](http://colorlines.com/archives/2015/03/why_mothers_are_on_strike_at_karnes_immigrant_detention_center.html)

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/local/article/Moms-in-immigration-detention-start-hunger-strike-6170467.php#photo-7730360>

# Stories From Mothers In Detention



## A Story of Hope Finally Realized

“95% of cases like this are losers,’ the DHS attorney had told me the previous Friday. “A series of unfortunate events” was how he dismissively characterized the severe and prolonged domestic violence that this resilient Honduran mother and her daughter experienced at the hands of her common law husband, the father of her child. Compound that with grisly gang-related threats to both mother and daughter. I knew we had a fight ahead of us.

Mom was “withholding only” due to a previous order of removal, when she had tried to flee her abuser in Honduras two years earlier. She would testify for both herself and her daughter. And it worked. Almost one week later, as I listened in from my office in Cleveland, OH, the judge granted withholding of removal to mom, and asylum to her daughter. The judge found her credible.

He found that the harm she had suffered from beatings, threats, and rape amounted to past persecution, and she was entitled to a presumption of future persecution, which the DHS failed to rebut. He found a clear probability of persecution if she were to return to Honduras, on account of her membership in a particular social group. Moreover, the judge found that her daughter had demonstrated a “well-founded fear” of persecution for all of the same reasons.

If “95% of cases like this are losers,” then I am incredibly grateful that my clients are in the 5% who will have a chance to live their lives free from fear. My clients got to leave. But there are hundreds of other women and children locked up who have credible claims to asylum, to the safety that our laws allow. They are not so lucky.

Why do we continue to treat them as a national security risk? More disturbingly, why do too few of our friends, our family members, our colleagues in the legal profession, know that this is happening? It is wrong. We know it is wrong. And I will continue to do everything in my power to stop it, one credible fear interview, one hearing, one case at a time. Please do the same. Together, we can #EndFamilyDetention.”

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\* This story was told by Daniel Natalie, a volunteer attorney for the American Immigration Lawyers Association at Karnes Detention Center

# Stories From Mothers In Detention




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## An Impossible Amount, An Impossible Burden

After suffering horrific violence at the hands of gangs, in 2012, Maria fled Guatemala to the U.S.. She was kidnapped at the border by the mafia in Arizona, and held for ransom, which her mother scraped and borrowed the \$8,000 to pay. Not knowing the law, she didn't file for asylum then because she was afraid she would be deported, and she needed to work to pay her mother back. She worked, cleaning homes, and provided financial support to her children in Guatemala.

In December 2014, she began receiving threats on her cell phone from local gangs. She tried blocking the number, but the gang found her mother and threatened her. The children were followed after school and were terrified for their lives. Maria went to lawyers to try to seek asylum for her children. She filled out the necessary forms, but she isn't sure what happened to them. She then went to the Guatemalan embassy in California, but they told her that they couldn't do anything to help and that she should send for her children.

Maria felt she had no choice. The gang told her she had to pay quickly or her two oldest children would be raped and burned alive. Within days Maria flew to Guatemala to try and protect them. The police were corrupt so she fled with her children. Maria used what funds she had to feed the children on the journey. She and her children have absolutely no money left. She has no one that could pay a bond to get her and her family out of the detention center.

If Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) follows their recent policy, then our government will set her bond at a minimum of \$7,500. That might as well be a million dollars. She has no way of paying such a high bond. She could barely manage to afford to keep herself and her children alive.

What is this gaining us? This determination to jail mothers and children rather than offer an alternative to detention is just wrong. And to "offer" them a bond that is so far beyond what they can pay is crueler still. It makes no fiscal sense, and it makes no moral sense. Family detention needs to end, and Maria and her children need to be released while they seek asylum from the abuse and terror they have suffered.

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\* This story was told by Victoria Carmona-Fehr, A Family Detention Project Volunteer and member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association

# Worship Resources



## Opening Prayer

God of dignity and life, today we honor the mothers, who have born and raised us, who shaped us into who we are today. We remember the struggle of so many mothers to raise their children, especially those who have seen their families struggle and suffer because of our broken immigration system. Some mothers are ripped away from their children by deportations; others have been unjustly forced into immigration detention centers with their children. God we pray for all those mothers in our congregation and throughout our country struggling for their families. May you bless them all this Mother's Day.

## Call to Worship

Leader: Oh God we pray for all the mothers throughout the world.

**People: We thank you for our own mother's guidance and love that has nurtured us into adulthood.**

Leader: We pray for those mothers who are living under family detention and yet are still working to protect and provide for their family, despite the injustices being levied against them. We pray for their welfare, their freedom, and their justice.

**People: O God, blessed are the mothers among us. Let the injustices of this system end here and now, as we pray to end family detention and work towards a world where we treat our immigrant brothers and sisters with open-armed hospitality and welcome. AMEN**

# Worship Resources

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## Closing Prayer/Benediction

Our God has nurtured and counseled us, brought us in when others rejected us, shown us the tender care that only a Mother, God could bring. We follow in the footsteps of our mothers who have shown us the way along our path.

We are ready to work towards justice for mothers who are protecting and advocating for their families as they are stuck in unjust detention. We pray for wisdom, guidance, and the conviction to listen to these families, stand up for them together, end family detention, and welcome all people fleeing violence and persecution regardless of their immigration status. Amen

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# Call-In Day: Thursday May 7th



## Stand Up For Justice For Mothers and Children In Family Detention!

Families fleeing violence shouldn't be locked up. Period. The United States' response to immigrants coming to the US as they flee violence in Central America has not honored the dignity of these immigrants or America's history as a place of welcome. Rather than welcoming these individuals with compassion and addressing their needs, the US has sought to deter other families from making this journey by detaining mothers and children in in prison-like conditions as they await legal proceedings that will decide their future. This practice is inhumane, inappropriate, and must be ended.

## Call your Senators and Representative to tell them that Family Detention is inhumane, unjust and must END NOW!

**Call 1-866-940-2439 to be connected to your member of Congress!**

### Suggested Script:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ calling from \_\_\_\_\_. I am a [name of your faith community] and a constituent, and I oppose the detention of mothers and children seeking refuge in the U.S. Central American families in DHS custody are seeking protection from violence, trafficking, and domestic abuse.

Children require specialized medical, educational, and legal support that detention facilities cannot provide. The Obama administration has rapidly expanded family detention since June 2014, claiming that mothers and children fleeing violence should be detained to deter others from migrating because this migration is a national security threat. Today over a thousand mothers and children are in detention in Texas and Pennsylvania.

Family detention violates our most basic obligations to treat people humanely. I hope you will publicly speak out against family detention and contact the White House to express your alarm over this practice. My faith compels me to welcome the stranger, and I want to see all family detention centers closed, and the use of family detention ended. I urge you to reject any expansion to this inhumane practice of family detention and instead stand with people of faith in supporting community-based alternatives that treat our brothers and sisters with dignity and respect.



## There are A LOT of ways that you can help END FAMILY DETENTION

### Support Families in Dilley with Bibles, Cards, and Prayers

- Encourage kids and moms with gifts of Children or Adult Spanish Bibles. Find out how to donate here: <http://bit.ly/1DqbSQp>
- Write “Angel to Angel” Cards of Care to children and mothers in detention: <http://bit.ly/1DO4T5X>
- Participate in a Prayer Vigil for children and mothers in Dilley on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. See flyer at: <http://bit.ly/1z0dknj>

### Sign the Faith Leaders Open Letter, and Recruit Other Faith Leaders To Sign

- The letter begins: “We, the undersigned faith leaders, write to you with grave concern about the practice of family detention in the United States. We oppose family detention on the grounds that it is immoral, inhumane, and unnecessary. We call upon the Administration to immediately halt the practice of family detention and employ alternatives that allow children freedom and dignity while they await due process.”
- The letter will be delivered to the White House in early May and we hope to have hundreds of signatures from the faith community! You can see the whole letter and sign it at <http://bit.ly/1G0qCWQ>

### Come to Dilley, TX on May 2 (or join a solidarity action in your city!)

- On May 2 come gather outside of the Dilley Family Detention Compound to support the mothers and children on the inside, and to protest the use of family detention.
- Build momentum for the Week of Action through **Mother’s Day**; find social media ideas and templates; and sign a petition to ICE Director, Sarah Saldaña, calling for an end to family detention here: <http://www.endfamilydetention.org> or contact Aurea Martinez ([amartinez@detentionwatchnetwork.org](mailto:amartinez@detentionwatchnetwork.org))
- You can find out more information here: <http://bit.ly/1GMonr3>

### Host a Film Screening

- Host a house-party or church gathering to screen the 30 minute video by Grassroots Leadership, **No Sanctuary: Big Business and Family Detention**. There is an accompanying study guide for group discussion. Contact Cristina Parker ([cparker@grassrootsleadership.org](mailto:cparker@grassrootsleadership.org)) for a copy of the film and the study guide.

## Call your Representative or Senator

- \* Find your Senators' contact information at: <http://1.usa.gov/KxiTHC>. Find out who your Representative is and his/her contact information at: <http://1.usa.gov/1e8pAws>.
- \* **Suggested script:** *My name is \_\_\_\_\_ calling from \_\_\_\_\_. I am a [name of your faith community] and a constituent, and I oppose immigrant family detention. Central American families held in DHS custody are seeking protection from violence, trafficking, and domestic violence. Children require specialized medical, educational, and legal support that detention facilities cannot provide. I hope you will publicly speak out against family detention and contact the White House to express your alarm over this practice. I want to see the Karnes, Dilley and Berks family detention centers closed, and the use of family detention ended.*

## Send A Postcard to President Obama.

- Organize your Sunday School class, committee, or entire church to send postcards.
- To request a batch of postcards, contact Mary Small ([msmall@detentionwatchnetwork.org](mailto:msmall@detentionwatchnetwork.org); 202-350-9057).



Dear President Obama,

You claim to stand for fairness and family unity, yet these values are severely jeopardized by the expansion of family detention camps in Texas.

Your policy of incarcerating women and children, including babies, endangers their mental and physical health. Women and children held in these camps are fleeing violence and often have legitimate claims to asylum, yet your policy systematically denies them of their right to due process.

Do not turn your back on women and children. You have the power to end family detention now, just as you largely did five years ago at the T. Don Hutto immigration jail amidst a firestorm of human rights abuses.

We call on you to uphold your values by immediately closing the Karnes and Dilley detention camps in Texas and declaring an end to family detention.

Sincerely,

(Name)

(Address)

President Obama

1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20500

## Sponsor A Refugee Backpack

- The Interfaith Welcome Coalition of San Antonio provides families who are released from detention, with basic supplies as they begin their long bus trips, to reunite with loved ones around the United States. An average trip is two days on a bus with several stops in between and mothers often have several children to feed, with little or no money.
- It costs \$25 to provide one family with these supplies; help them fill a Refugee Backpack by sponsoring one with a donation of \$25 here: <http://www.raicetexas.org/pages/backpack>

## Get Educated About Family Detention And Share What You Learn

- Backgrounder from Detention Watch Network: <http://bit.ly/1MHflwO>
- The Shame of America's Family Detention Camps from the New York Times Magazine: <http://nyti.ms/1IMvI8U>
- Locking Up Family Values, Again; Report by WRC and LIRS about Artesia: <http://lirs.org/familyvalues/>
- For-Profit Family Detention: Meet the Private Prison Corporations Making Millions by Locking Up Refugee Families; Report by Grassroots Leadership: <http://bit.ly/1I0vqha>
- Share What You Learn Via Social Media By Using **#EndFamilyDetention**