

On January 10, 2020, Texas Governor Greg Abbott wrote a letter to the US State Department declining to participate in the federal program to resettle refugees in BY2020. Many news outlets have reported this as a decision by Governor Abbott to refuse or reject refugees. These reports seem unnecessarily inflammatory. The President's executive order requires states to indicate their willingness to participate. Governor Abbott has stated explicitly what other states have said implicitly by not opting into the program to resettle.

I am disappointed by the decision Governor Abbott has made. The federal government had already set the 2020 cap a historically low 18,0000. Moreover, with nearly 9% of the overall United States population, it seems consistent with our size and population for Texas to average the 10% of refugees that Governor Abbott said we have received since BY2010. I understand that Governor Abbott believes that Texas has done its share of the work. I also believe we have done our share. However, I would hope that Texas might walk the extra mile as we seek to serve those who may be fleeing persecution and privation. I would have preferred that his letter not discuss the numbers of people apprehended for crossing the border illegally. The inclusion of these details in this context could be misleading. The refugees in question are persons who have taken the necessary steps to enter the United States legally.

Each person must discern their own opinions concerning contemporary issues. I offer these reflections for myself alone. As a person of Christian faith, I believe compassion and accountability must walk together. It is not a lack of compassion to insist that people follow rules. It is, in fact, how we guarantee that an extension of compassion to one person does not infringe upon the rights or needs of another. It is incumbent upon the law makers and executives to ensure that those who abide by the stated rules and laws are given fair treatment. Within my denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we have a long history of caring for refugees. I work closely with one of the key ministries in the refugee resettlement work—Southwest Good Samaritan Outreach Ministries in Los Fresnos, Texas. Our history with refugees and immigrants within the Christian Church has convinced many of us that we are a richer, fuller, and more compassionate people when we do all we can to extend welcome to those who enter.

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