

March 12, 2014

RE: Philadelphia City Council Hearing ICE Hold Requests

Dear Honorable Members of the City Council of Philadelphia. I am the Reverend Adan A. Mairena from the West Kensington Ministry at Norris Square. We are a Presbyterian ministry and are part of the Presbytery of Philadelphia which comprises of over 120 churches in Philadelphia and the surrounding region. I am here and will read my personal statement and am joined by my colleague, the Reverend Esdras Seda who will read a statement on behalf of the Hispanic Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity. We thank you for having the foresight for having this issue of great importance before us and for including our voice in the planned response to this issue.

I normally do not participate in hearings but want to let you know that many in the faith community find it urgent to express our stand that our city should ban ICE HOLDS. I am proud to proclaim that our city was founded as a safe haven for those fleeing religious persecution centuries ago. However, I am embarrassed that today our city is not considered a safe haven for those who have no choice but to flee their home countries for economic persecution, that is poverty or the lack to sustain ones' self and ones' family. 17 other localities, including Miami, San Francisco, Newark, New Orleans and New York City have banned or modified ICE holds. As a proud Philadelphian I believe, as many of you do, that our city needs to recapture its identity as a place that welcomes the stranger and not a place that terrorizes him or her.

Honorable members of City Council, the Philadelphia Family Unity Network, a city wide community-led coalition reminds us that ICE holds that are issued solely because of immigration status and are not reviewed by a judge before they are issued, violates our community's due process and human rights, increases racial profiling, wastes precious city dollars and decreases public safety. The coalition also states that ICE holds also traumatize families and communities. And, I have witnessed this traumatic effect first hand.

Last year Pricilla, a single mother and her 7 year old son, Marcos, started attending our church. Marcos, as all children was excited to become part of a family and enjoyed his new environment. However, I noticed that Marcos bit other children, hit them and had several tantrums. Marcos was affectionate towards me and always ran up to me and hugged my knees. One night I saw Pricilla getting off the bus near the church and I walked her home. She was tired for she had just finished cleaning apartments here in Center City. I walked her home and our conversation got to Marcos. She said *"Pastor, I'm sorry that Marcos behaves the way he does and I understand if you don't want us to come to church, I understand if the other moms are mad at me and think I'm a bad mom."* She paused and trusted me enough to share the following *"ever since La Migra took his father because he didn't have an I D card, it has been really hard."* I thought to myself, *"No wonder he lashes out to people and runs and hugs my knees...his mom is always working, he doesn't have his father and doesn't understand why....he's angry."*

In 1562, England's Queen Elizabeth lent Sir John Hawkins a ship by the name, - ironically enough - The Good Ship Jesus. Sir John Hawkins traveled to the coast of Africa and captured 300-500 slaves through violence. Yes. Sir John Hawkins has the dubious distinction of becoming the first slave-ship captain to bring Africans to the Americas.

At that point the law of the land was a ruling monarchical system that combined forces with an inhumane economic structure where people were deemed commodities, property, and sources of profit. Families were broken up and traumatized. Many Pricillas lost their husbands and many Marcos' lost their fathers. I believe that was something that God was not in favor of. Today, we have progressed enough to be ruled under a democratic system. However, families that have been separated by that system could argue that what happened in 1562, the traumatic separation of families, is happening today. And I believe that God is not in favor of that.

Honorable members of City Council, I thank you for the opportunity to express the concern many of us have in the faith community and I pray that you continue the work you are doing of progressing our democratic system and continuing to make our great city a place that welcomes the stranger by banning ICE holds.

Respectfully,

The Reverend Adan A. Mairena, The West Kensington Ministry, Norris Square