Justice for Immigrants
A Prayer for Mothers and Children in Detention

Call to 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 mothers throughout our country struggling for their families. May you bless them all this Mother's Day.

Opening Song: Peace Prayer by John Foley SJ / “Lord Make Me a Means of Your Peace”

Opening Prayer:

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

All: We thank you for our own mother’s guidance and love that has nurtured us into adulthood.

Leader: We pray for those immigrant 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.

All: 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

Reading: “An Impossible Amount, An Impossible Burden” Taken from Stories From Mothers In Detention

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 $8,000 ransom, which her mother scraped and borrowed 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. Source: (ADAPTED) This story was told by Victoria Carmona-Fehr, A Family Detention Project Volunteer and member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association

**Moment of Reflection:**

**Sharing:** As you learn more about the struggle of immigrants in our nation, how is this awareness engaging with your faith and shaping your understanding of justice?

**Response:**

**Leader:** Exodus 23: 9
You must not oppress the stranger;
you know how a stranger feels,
for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt.

**Reader:** Leviticus 19: 32-34
If a stranger lives with you in your land, do not molest them. You must count him as one of your own people and love them as yourself—for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.

**Leader:** Isaiah 10: 1-2
Woe to the legislators of infamous laws,
to those who issue tyrannical decrees,
who refuse justice to the unfortunate
and cheat the poor among my people of their rights,
who make widows their prey,
and rob the orphan.

**Reader:** Micah 6: 8
What is good has been explained to you;
this is what Yahweh asks of you:
only this, to act justly,
to love tenderly,
and to walk humbly with your God.

**Intercessory Prayers**

† For an end to the violence and poverty that displaces so many people from their homes and homelands, we pray to the Lord.

Response: Lord, hear our prayer.

† For our leaders, that they may implement policies that allow for safe migration, just migrant working conditions, and an end to the detention of asylum seekers, while protecting our national safety, we pray to the Lord. R.

† For migrant workers, that they may labor in safe and justice conditions, and that we who benefit from their labor may be truly grateful for what they provide, we pray to the Lord. R.

† For unaccompanied migrant children, that they may be protected from all harm and reunited with loving families, we pray to the Lord. R.

† For an end to human trafficking, that the dignity of all of God’s children will be protected, we pray to the Lord. R.

**Closing Prayer:**

**Leader:** 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.

**All:** We will continue 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.

AMSSND Shalom/JPIC Office: (Adapted)