



American Baptist Home Mission Societies

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## **The Church as Refuge: A Pastoral Response to Mass Deportations**

**OMAHA, NE (ABNS 07/03/2025)**—*What follows is a brief letter from three senior leaders of American Baptist Home Mission Societies on behalf of its Board of Directors addressing recent and ongoing actions by federal authorities that are fueling the current deportation crisis.*

Dear American Baptist Family,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For generations, American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) has responded to Christ's call to welcome the stranger and walk with those on the margins. Our ancestors in faith sojourned vast distances, fleeing famine and war and seeking refuge in other lands. Scripture teaches us how to care for one another. "Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. Treat them like the native-born among you and love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners living in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 19:33-34)

Since 1948, our Refugee Resettlement ministry has helped more than 93,000 individuals find safety, hope, and new life in the United States. We write to you now out of deep concern for the well-being of our immigrant neighbors and the sanctity of the local church.

Recent actions by federal authorities have escalated mass deportation efforts, often through expedited removals that sidestep due process. These measures are sowing fear in communities

across the country, placing families at risk, and undermining the fundamental values of justice and compassion that we hold dear.

As American Baptists, we affirm the sacred nature of our houses of worship. Churches are places of prayer; our sanctuaries are also places of refuge, mission, and ministry. The presence of immigration enforcement officers in or near these spaces, without consent or proper legal oversight, threatens both the spiritual safety of those who gather and the religious liberty that our nation guarantees to all.

We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to our immigrant siblings:

- We will continue to offer pastoral care, accompaniment, and advocacy for immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and those facing deportation.
- We believe churches and other sacred spaces must be protected from enforcement actions unless due process is followed, and the community consents.
- We urge the federal authorities to honor and expand the sensitive locations policy, which protects houses of worship.<sup>1</sup>
- We support legal advocacy groups working to uphold the rights of immigrant and refugee individuals and congregations.
- We call on American Baptists to speak with their elected officials and advocate for policies safeguarding families and preserving religious freedom.

We also encourage pastors and church leaders to educate their congregations and to prepare for encounters with immigration enforcement in ways that reflect the gospel's call to hospitality and courage.

ABHMS will continue to monitor federal policy and enforcement developments, provide resources and guidance, and elevate these concerns through our Justice Dialogues and public witness. We are committed to ensuring that no person of faith must choose between their safety and their sanctuary.

We ask for your prayers, prophetic voice, and faithful presence. We encourage our fellow American Baptist individuals and congregations to discern their particular role as a sanctuary, ally, advocate, or pastoral presence in the broader movement for immigration justice. May we live out our calling to be people of welcome, justice, and fearless love.

In peace and solidarity,

Rev. Dr. Jamie Washam, President, ABHMS Board of Directors

Rev. Trevor Hyde, Vice President, ABHMS Board of Directors

Dr. Jeffrey Haggray, Executive Director, ABHMS & CEO, Judson Press

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<sup>1</sup> The "sensitive locations" policy previously limited immigration enforcement actions in specific locations, but the Trump administration rescinded it in January 2025. This change means that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) can now conduct enforcement actions, including arrests, in previously protected areas like schools, hospitals, and places of worship.

On behalf of the ABHMS Board of Directors

*American Baptist Home Mission Societies partners with American Baptists to promote Christian faith, cultivate Christ-centered leaders and disciples, and bring healing and transformation to communities across the United States and Puerto Rico.*

*American Baptist Churches USA is one of the most diverse Christian denominations today, with approximately 5,000 congregations comprised of 1.3 million members across the United States and Puerto Rico, all engaged in God's mission around the world.*

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