

**Statement of First Presbyterian Church, Portland, Oregon
Regarding Executive Orders Banning Immigrants from Six Majority Muslim Countries
April 5, 2017**

We are a Presbyterian congregation in the heart of downtown Portland, Oregon. Although our members represent a variety of political persuasions and economic circumstances we all find the foundation of our faith in the prophetic call to do justice, in the compassionate and accepting teaching and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Confessions of our Reformed tradition. As Presbyterians, we seek to act only after careful reflection and consideration, following God's call to support what is right and to oppose what is wrong. We thus affirm our reformed and reforming faith through the Biblical Word, in prayer, and by mindful deeds.

The unfolding ramifications and events surrounding the Executive Orders of January 27, and March 6, 2017, which attempt to ban from this country, temporarily or permanently, the most vulnerable persons fleeing from conflicts in the Muslim-majority countries of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen, have caused untold harm to the very people--the least of these, His brothers and sisters--who our Lord has told us to support and protect. The fundamental nature of the orders--the denial of refuge to those in greatest need--is antithetical to our faith. They have directly affected our ability to carry out the mission that our Lord has given us at the very time that we have been preparing to fulfill that mission by welcoming refugees from some of those very countries.

The rationale for the executive orders is fear of terrorism, a fear that in this case has no basis in reason or experience. No person from the affected countries has committed a terrorist act on American soil. Refugees who come from those countries have been thoroughly vetted before being admitted. As Christians, we reject the irrational fear behind these orders; we are a congregation rooted in faith, not fear. As President Craig Barnes of Princeton Theological Seminary has stated, "Policies that promote such fear do not represent a gospel vision for the flourishing of humankind or for our life together."

Scripture reminds us that we were all foreigners, even refugees, and encourages us to welcome outsiders into our community: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you: you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." (Leviticus 19:34). "[T]here shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you." (Exodus 12:49). Jesus tells us that in welcoming the foreigner we welcome Him: "[F]or I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35). Our congregation has welcomed strangers and refugees over the years. The executive orders came at the very time that we were preparing to welcome a new refugee family. Although the orders made it impossible for us to do so, we have been able to welcome a Somali Muslim family of eight who arrived in Portland just nine days before the executive order. We are blessed to get to know and provide love, friendship and resources for that refugee family, but we cannot avoid wondering about other families who we might also have helped but who were prevented from coming.

Scripture does not tell us to welcome only Christians like ourselves and to ignore all others; it tells us to welcome everyone. The executive orders' targeting of countries with majority Muslim populations, based as it is on promises to ban all Muslims, reflects an intolerance and fear of others that is contrary to our faith. We do not condone religious intolerance and fear, but, rather, seek by interfaith dialogue to foster understanding and brotherhood among all peoples. Adherents of Islam, like Jews and Christians, trace their faith back to Abraham; there is much that we have in common.

The executive orders threaten other refugees who have already secured safety within our borders and communities. They have now been marginalized and even suffered persecution by the conflict, court fights, uncertainties, and heightened rhetoric and fear that the orders have stimulated. Rather than creating conflict that breeds only more conflict, we seek to sow seeds of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9).

As a community of faith, within the past several years our congregation has hosted and supported Presbyterian mission co-workers in Sudan/South Sudan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. It has sent its own members to Uganda. Whether in the U.S., or in war-torn majority Muslim or other countries anywhere in the world, we stand ready to abide by Jesus' warning about ignoring the most vulnerable: "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." (Matthew 25:45). Our church's confessions, which provide guidance for our actions, follow Jesus' statements by warning us against racial prejudice, segregation and persecution. The executive orders threaten to increase each of these things.

Especially in these present times of trial, we pledge as a congregation of faith in the heart of this city to continue to pursue our mission of "Glorifying God, Proclaiming Christ, and Serving Others." "By linking hearts and hands, living out what we believe and striving for God's kingdom of love, justice, and peace," we further pledge to welcome the alien and the stranger, and to stand together against oppression through God's love and strength, by Jesus' resurrection and life, and with the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Sources:

The New Interpreter's Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, Abingdon Press (Nashville, TN), © 2003.

"President Barnes of Princeton Seminary responds to Immigration Ban," Sent to Rev. Audrey Schindler by email, alumni@ptsem.edu and forwarded, February 7, 2017.

"Country's Largest Christian Ecumenical Organization Condemns President Trump Targeting Muslim Communities," Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon Media Release, January 27, 2017. (Print, received by mail.)

"Stated Clerk opposes order banning refugees' entry into U.S., Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) News & Announcements, January 28, 2017, <http://www.pcusa.org/news/2017/1/28/stated-ckerk-opposes-order-banning-refugees-entry/>