

A Pastoral Letter

On June 16, 2018, The Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), published a letter addressing the issue of family separation on the US-Mexico border.

Dr. Nelson was elected Stated Clerk at the 222nd General Assembly (2016) in Portland, Oregon. As Stated Clerk, his duties include interpreting assembly actions, representing the church on various denominational and ecumenical councils, witnessing on behalf of the church to social justice issues, and making statements as directed by an assembly.

Because many Westminster members have expressed concern about this issue, and especially about our response as a church and a denomination, the pastoral staff wanted to make you aware of this letter. Part of it is excerpted below. The entire letter can be found online at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) website (pcusa.org).

As Presbyterians gather for the meeting of our 223rd General Assembly, we are mindful of the many issues of justice, peace and compassion we face, both as citizens of the United States and members of the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . [but] there is nothing of more urgency than the tragedy that is unfolding at our borders, where children are ripped from their parents and placed in holding cells, while their frantic parents scream in agony at the separation.

What has this nation become? How have we wandered so far from Jesus' kind admonition, "Let the little children come to me . . . for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs"? How can this be happening in a nation in which so many claim the traditions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam and the critical importance of families to the fabric of our lives together? . . .

What makes matters worse is the audacity of quoting the Apostle Paul's admonition to believers in Romans 13:1 to obey the law (presumably whatever the law says), while ignoring the higher scriptural demand that "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10).

The crisis of tens of thousands of desperate people coming to the United States for relief seems almost overwhelming. But as the officials of our government attempt to address the crisis, we cannot afford to tarnish the highest values of our nation. We must not punish desperate parents by tearing their children away from them, leaving the parents without access to the children or assurance of their welfare. . . .

*In the faith we share,
[signed] J. Herbert Nelson, II*

On June 21 2018, the 223rd General Assembly—by a vote of 484-34—passed a resolution calling on the federal government to “immediately end the newly implemented zero-tolerance policy . . . [and] reunite parents and families that have been separated as soon as possible.” The entire resolution should be available online on the PCUSA website and the website of *The Presbyterian Outlook*.