

BEYOND THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

posted 1/24/2026 by Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr.

Beloved United Methodists of the Horizon Texas Conference,

The grace of God, the love of Christ, and the peace, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit be with you.

We stand together in a moment demanding clarity and courage. In Minneapolis and across this nation, children are separated from parents, citizens detained without warrant, and families terrorized. I write to you not as a partisan, but as your bishop—compelled by the Gospel to name what is happening and call the Church to action.

I am also mindful that many of those carrying out these orders are themselves caught in a system that may be causing them moral injury; asked to enforce policies that contradict their deepest convictions about human dignity. They, too, are our neighbors, our brothers and sisters in Christ. They, too, deserve our prayers and our witness that there is another way to live, another way to serve, another way to uphold order without dehumanizing the vulnerable. When we stand for justice, we stand also for their liberation from systems that wound the soul.

We live in Texas and polarization around immigration policy runs deep. But this is not primarily political. This is a theological crisis - about who Jesus is and what the Church is for.

Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel: "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me." When a five-year-old is taken from his preschool because his father sought asylum, we are looking at the face of Christ. When families shiver in fear, we are looking at the face of Christ. This is the direct teaching of Jesus.

John Wesley declared: "There is no holiness but social holiness." Holiness, becoming who God created us to be, cannot happen alone. It happens as we gather in community and actively pursue justice for those pushed to the margins.

Our United Methodist Church affirms the dignity, worth and rights of migrants, immigrants and refugees. We commit to welcoming them, providing legal support, opposing laws that criminalize them, resisting family separation, and offering refuge and help. These flow from who we are as Christ followers and Methodists. They flow from the Gospel itself.

There is a false gospel being preached that says: pray for the suffering without standing with them, offer comfort without cost, remain safe while others suffer. This is not the Gospel of Christ.

Jesus entered fully into human suffering. He sat with the despised. He broke the law to show mercy. He called his followers to do the same. We cannot follow him from a distance.

We are not powerless. This is how we can practice being faithful if we feel overwhelmed.

Choose one or more:

First: Bear Witness. Learn the names of those detained. Call your representatives. Write to editors. Share what you learn. Your voice matters.

Second: Become Refuge. Ask your leadership: How can our church become a place of refuge? Offer legal help, housing, welcome migrants into full participation in church life. This is the privilege of discipleship.

Third: Stand With the Arrested. Support bail funds. Attend trials. Show up. The Church stands with its own.

Fourth: Build Beloved Community. Sit face-to-face with others, especially with those who see this differently. Ask together: "What does the Gospel call us to?" The only antidote to polarization is genuine relationship.

Do these things together, do not do them by yourself. Gather in small groups. Meet weekly. Ask each other: "How are you living this out?" This is the Methodist way.

A word to those who are afraid. Fear is not the final word. Love is. Jesus called us to follow him, to take up a cross, to love our neighbors as ourselves; including the immigrant, the detained, the vulnerable.

When we stand with the vulnerable, we stand with Christ. We trust that God's justice will ultimately prevail. We trust that resurrection is more powerful than death.

We are not powerless. We are not alone. We are the Church.

A Prayer

Almighty God, you came to us in Jesus Christ - Emmanuel, God with us - particularly with those pushed to the margins. We confess that we have often chosen comfort over courage, silence over speech, prayer without action. Forgive us. Transform us. Give us the grace to see Christ in those detained. Make us brave enough to stand with them. Enable us, by your Spirit, to pay the price of discipleship. Gather us with all those who cry for justice. Make us one beloved community. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

We go now, not in our own strength, but in God's. We speak truth. We stand with the vulnerable. We build beloved community. We open your hearts. We open your doors. And know that we do not go alone.

In the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, may we go forth, One with Christ and One with each other to love and serve the world.