

## Moment for Mission on Welcoming Immigrants 4.9.17 (Sarah Rogerson)

Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Pastor Kate, for the introduction. In addition to my background as an immigration attorney, I am also an Immigration Law Professor at Albany Law School where I work as Director of the Law Clinic & Justice Center and teach the Immigration Law Clinic. While I can't claim to know everything about immigration law, and while I can't provide legal advice in individual situations, I hope I can provide helpful context and offer up what expertise I have accumulated as you continue your conversations around welcoming immigrants, which I understand started long before I became a member this morning.

Those of you who were here will remember Pastor Kate's sermon about the woman in Denver who is seeking sanctuary with a church in Colorado. You'll recall that she is in a situation where she is eligible for a U-Visa for victims of violent crime and her application is pending, but that immigration enforcement officials were seeking to remove her anyway. You may be asking, "How often does that really happen, though?" And the answer unfortunately is, "All. The. Time."

You see, the part of the immigration bureaucracy that handles the issuance of visas is separate from the part that enforces immigration laws - and they don't always communicate with each other very well. Even when they do, there is little coordination. In part, it's because Congress and the current Administration have created incentives for non-cooperation and haven't properly allocated budget expenditures. Immigration enforcement officials, including Immigration Judges, have a lot of discretion when it comes to deciding whether to wait for a visa application to be processed before they engage in removal activities. And enforcement is funded and staffed at a much higher rate than visa processing. Enormous backlogs have resulted from under-funding. In fact, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services office is now processing U-Visa applications from June of 2014. That's nearly a three-year wait.

However, the Administration is speeding up the removal process, pouring money into enforcement and expanding the reach of what's called "expedited removal", which speeds up the deportation process for people who have been here for less than two years. But two years is enough to start a family and get established. So you have the visa application process being slowed down and enforcement sped up, resulting in a very lop-sided situation for many people who are trying to achieve lawful status in the United States.

So, when I speak with faith groups, I am asking them to advocate for a "Pause for Mercy" - asking the government to enforce immigration laws in a way that is more humane and to give people time to get their affairs in order and make arrangements for their families, even if ultimately their applications are not approved and they are ultimately removed from the country. In our clinic, my students and I work with undocumented kids who are seeking Special Immigrant Juvenile status, which if successful, will ultimately result in them obtaining a green card and lawful permanent resident status. The application process is complicated and long; we worry about them in this climate of stepped-up enforcement without regard for individual circumstance.

I so appreciate the work that you are all doing and I am proud to be joining a community that cares about these issues. If I can be of assistance as you continue the conversation, please don't hesitate to ask. Thank you.