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Valuing the sanctity of life means openness to refugees

Teri Carter

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Everyday, I pass our small community church with its automated sign close to the road. The sign reads, in bright red letters and all caps: ALL LIVES ARE SACRED!

The church is about halfway to town, and it's got a safe, easy spot to slow down and pull over, so this is where I stop if I need to send a text message or finish a phone call before I hit one of those dead cell service spots.

With the travel ban/Muslim ban/immigration ban/refugee ban (whatever you want to call it) I've been thinking a lot about the words "all lives" on the church's sign.

It is hard to get into the United States. Our president talks a lot about extreme vetting, yet he has never defined what, exactly, he means. The fact is our vetting is already extreme. Refugees fleeing war and persecution in their home countries face a rigorous and exhaustive screening process, a process can take from 18-24 months.

Imagine you are desperately trying to save your family — your newborn, your teenagers, your elderly parents — from certain death and having to wait a year and a half or two to clear all of the investigations and paperwork. But you are willing because your lives depend on it.

You do everything that is asked of you. You wait. You hope. You sell everything. You pray. And though you pass every test you've been given, the U.S. suddenly invokes an inexplicable, emergency ban telling you that your family is unwanted, unwelcome, and feared.

How devastating to learn that, while church signs in America scream "All lives are sacred!" in big red letters, they are not talking about your life.

The president remains emphatic this new ban is meant to keep us safe. America first! Yet virtually all of our recent attacks have come from homegrown American terrorists.

The Orlando shooter was born in New York. Dylan Roof was a white supremacist born in South Carolina. The Aurora, Colo., theater shooter was born in San Diego. Even the Boston marathon bombers were from Chechnya (not on the travel ban list).

According to the Cato Institute, in the last 37 years no refugee, Syrian or otherwise, has committed a major terror attack in the United States.

So just how does the president's travel ban make us safer?

The president's poorly implemented ban wreaked havoc around this country and the world. Thousands of lives were affected, sending internationally traveling families into panic, uncertainty, and confusion. Two stories specifically have stuck with me.

One young man waited all day at the Los Angeles airport for the release of his 80-year-old Iranian grandmother. She'd already traveled 20 hours, and was then locked in a small room with other detainees for nine hours. She does not speak English. She had no idea what was happening. She was, rightly, terrified. When she was finally released, the young man found out she'd had no food and had been provided only eight ounces of water.

Despite completing all of the required paperwork, an Iranian couple with a four month-old baby scheduled for heart surgery was denied entry into the U.S. The family was already in transit with their sick child, and found out during their layover in Dubai that they were no longer welcome in United States. They had no choice but to return to Iran.

We often hear Americans make simplistic statements about foreigners, particularly about Middle Easterners. "They hate us for our freedom," they say. Based on stories like the ones above, I'd argue we don't give ourselves enough credit.

How would you feel if your 80-year-old grandmother were treated this way? Imagine your very sick four month-old baby being denied, completely without reason, the medical care you've been promised?

A recent morning, I drove to town. And though I did not need to make a call or send a text, I pulled into the safe spot by the church, stared at the big red letters, and said a prayer.

Because for all our big, blustering talk about Christian values and "love thy neighbor" and "do unto others" and signs insisting, "All lives are sacred!" we are failing, as the president would say, bigly.