



South Sound church stands with refugees

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At a time when the world is facing the greatest refugee crisis in recorded history, with more than 65 million people forcibly displaced from their homes, President Donald Trump announced an executive order that will dramatically reduce the number of refugees admitted to the United States.

Last weekend, many of us experienced the anxiety of a disorganized rollout of this order, which resulted in hundreds of people stranded in airports, stuck between the life they knew and the life they hoped for.

As a pastor of a congregation that has a history of welcoming refugees, this new order concerns me. I respect the president's authority, but I'm very concerned by this policy change. It will delay our ability to respond to vulnerable and marginalized people.

My commitment to welcoming refugees is rooted in my commitment to scripture. The Bible speaks frequently and clearly to God's concern for refugees and other vulnerable foreigners. Jesus himself was a refugee when Mary, Joseph and Jesus were forced to flee to Egypt in order to evade the grasp of a tyrannical King.

Jesus told his disciples that part of the most important, all-inclusive commandment was to love our neighbors as ourselves. In case we'd be tempted to narrowly define who our "neighbor" is, Jesus told a story — that of the Good Samaritan.

Likewise, I want to treat those arriving into our community today with the same compassionate welcome that I would want to give my Savior.

President Trump is right to prioritize the security of American citizens as he formulates policy; I believe that God has ordained government for this purpose. However, it is a false choice to

presume we must choose between compassion and security. We already have an extremely thorough and highly effective vetting process for refugees being considered for resettlement to the U.S.

That screening, which occurs entirely overseas and generally takes between 18 months and three years, is coordinated by the Departments of State, Homeland Security and Defense, as well as the FBI and National Counterterrorism Center.

It involves in-person interviews with carefully trained Homeland Security officers, biographic and biometric background checks, forensic document testing and a medical screening. If there is any doubt about a person's identity, they are not allowed to come to the U.S.

In fact, this screening process is the most thorough process any category of visitor or immigrant to the U.S. is required to undergo — and it has a strong record.

Since the Refugee Act was passed in 1980, not a single American life has been lost to a terrorist attack committed by someone who came here through the refugee resettlement program.

Including one incident that occurred in the 1970s, research by the Cato Institute has assessed the odds of an American being killed in any given year by a refugee-turned-terrorist at 1 in 3.64 billion.

There are no perfect systems, no ironclad guarantees that something bad will never happen, but the limited risks in welcoming refugees are not worth sacrificing the values of compassion and hospitality at the core of our faith and national values.

Many of those admitted to the U.S. from Iraq, in particular, face horrific persecution by terrorists because of their service to the U.S. military. We cannot turn our back on these brave individuals who have risked their lives for our country.

While I am concerned about the well-being of all refugees — including those of other faith backgrounds — this policy change could particularly harm persecuted Christians. This policy could unintentionally fuel extremist anti-Christian ideologies in other parts of the world, imperiling the lives of Christians and other religious minorities.

Scripture commands us to pray for our leaders, and I am committed to praying for President Trump as he takes on the enormous responsibilities of his new post. In particular, I'm praying that he'll reverse course, allowing carefully screened refugees to continue to be welcomed as they have been for decades.

In the meantime, our church and many others will stand alongside our refugee neighbors, and I urge others to join us, supporting World Relief and other ministries as they face financial pressures as a result of these policy changes.

The church continues to stand with refugees, because the faith-inspired spirit of welcome and love are cornerstones of our faith and our country.