

# Faith leaders call for humane treatment of immigrants

September 12, 2018

EL PASO—Theologians, clergy and community organizers from across the country met at the border between Sunland Park, N.M., and Juarez, Mexico, to urge a more humane U.S. response to immigrants.



Dylan Corbett, executive director of Hope Border Institute, opened an interfaith service near the border wall with prayer. He called the area where Texas, New Mexico and Mexico meet “Holy Land.” (Photo / Isa Torres)

The [\*El Grito de las Fronteras\*](#) (Cry from the Border) event in the El Paso area included a prayer vigil, rally and educational sessions in which interfaith leaders formed a theological, political and ethical critique of the immigration crisis. They insisted the way immigrants are treated by the United States does not match the message of their faiths.

Seminary professors from a Baptist heritage who participated included

Miguel De La Torre, professor of social ethics and Latinx studies at Iliff School of Theology, and Bill Walker, assistant director of spiritual formation at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary.

The immigration crisis has brought some Christians in the United States to hold opposing views in terms of whether to follow U.S. law or the commandments seen in Scriptures, participants noted.

## **Biblical mandate to care for neighbors**

Representatives from varied Christian denominations—along with Jewish and Muslim faith leaders—insisted God called his people to welcome and care for their neighbors. But faith leaders at the event said the border wall and the security used to protect it are signs of U.S. leaders' refusal to respond to that call.



Bill Walker

“The biblical mandate to care for the foreigner and the migrant is abundantly clear,” Walker said. “Regardless of what one thinks about immigration in this country, there is no question about our obligation to demand humane treatment of these individuals and families.”

If this is the way the nation responds to immigration, people of faith need to speak up, De La Torre said.

“We cannot remain silent while every four days five brown bodies die in the desert,” he said. “If people of faith cannot stand in solidarity with those who are being crushed under these unjust immigration laws, then we are not people of faith.”

During the last presidential election, then-candidate Donald Trump [proposed](#) a hard line on border security, referring to undocumented immigrants as criminals and abusers of social welfare.

However, researchers debunked the [alleged link](#) between increased immigration and a rise in crime. Other studies reported many undocumented immigrants [pay taxes](#) that fund benefits they do not use.

“The need to raise awareness about this issue among Christians in general and Texas Baptists in particular is as urgent as ever,” Walker said.

## **Bible filled with immigrant stories**



In addition to the prayer vigil and rally at the border wall, some participants in El Grito de las Fronteras organized a silent protest outside the El Paso Processing Center. (Photo / Isa Torres)

For some of the theologians and religion scholars at the event in El Paso, involvement in a movement to demand justice for immigrants began last November, when they signed "[The Boston Declaration](#)."

The document expressed the signatories' view that many evangelicals and other Christians were normalizing oppression in the United States—particularly oppression of immigrants.

The Bible is saturated with stories of immigrants seeking refuge in other places, De La Torre said. The narrative begins with Adam and Eve, and it includes Abraham and his descendants, the nation of Israel and even baby Jesus, he said.

"As Baptists, we say we have no creed but the Bible," De La Torre said. "But we Baptists are totally ignoring the biblical message of 'I was a stranger and you took me in.'"

The El Paso-area event was the first of several in September focused on immigration.

On Sept. 16, Victoria en Cristo in Fort Worth will hold a [prayer service](#) for just immigration laws.

Project Lifeline, a nonprofit organization concerned about the treatment of children in U.S. Customs and Border Patrol detention centers, will sponsor panels Sept. 28 in both [Houston](#) and [San Antonio](#) to talk about the integrative care detained children need, said Hope Frye, founding director of the organization. The following day, caravans from Houston and San Antonio will drive to McAllen with food supplies, bottled water, basic medical care and blankets for the children in the largest CBP detention center in the United States.