

June 8, 2023

TO: Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone, members of the Nassau County Legislature and Suffolk County Legislature, Supervisors and Board Members of the Towns of Hempstead, North Hempstead, Oyster Bay, Huntington, Babylon, Smithtown, Islip, Brookhaven, Riverhead, Southampton, Easthampton, Southold and Shelter Island

“You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice...Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your G-d redeemed you from there; therefore, I command you to do this.” [Deuteronomy 24:17-18]

“I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” [Matthew 25:35]

The Holy Qur’an repeatedly requires the faithful to comply with agreements and treaties on the rights of refugees, praising those who go to the assistance of people in distress and requiring the faithful to protect them [9:100 and 117], including non-Muslims, by providing amam (safeguard).

We, the undersigned, are an interfaith community of clergy and lay leaders, and the mandates in our traditions could not be clearer. As people representing many faith traditions, we profess the full humanity and dignity of all people, all created in the Spirit of Life’s image. Our sacred texts mandate love, hospitality and a commitment to love our neighbor, with a strong emphasis — literally scores of scriptural mandates — on welcoming the stranger, sojourners from another land.

In recent years, 68 million people worldwide have fled their homes seeking safety. Children account for more than half of this total. Families requesting safety at our borders are fleeing economic exploitation, organized crime, political repression, war, and sexual violence, much of it rooted in disruptions caused by climate disasters and political destabilization. Recent reports indicate that current asylum seekers also include those who have fled Afghanistan after providing assistance to the United States, whose lives now would be in danger at home. Any of us would ask for refuge for our families if faced with the same threats.

Many U.S. towns and cities, including Nassau and Suffolk Counties—consistent with our nation’s foundational ideal to be a place where people come for safety and freedom—have long been welcoming, housing, and employing our immigrant neighbors as they await their court asylum hearings. Houses of worship and non-profits provide

care, critical support services, and community. Together as Long Islanders, we can continue (with essential government support and partnerships on the federal, state and local levels) to honor the core values of our diverse faiths and our nation by being a community of welcome.

Unfortunately, some Long Island officials have done just the opposite: inflaming tensions and fears by issuing irresponsible calls to bar asylum seekers from our towns and counties, despite the fact that under both U.S. and International law these asylum seekers are guaranteed the right to seek asylum.

Such rhetoric is especially disheartening considering that during the height of the pandemic, lives were literally saved by essential workers, many of whom are immigrants. They cared for our elderly and disabled family members, planted, harvested and delivered our food, cleaned our public spaces, and much more. While some of us were locked down in our homes, immigrant workers were laboring to strengthen Long Island and our communities.

Our sacred scriptures insist that “neighbor” is never defined as proximity or nationality. Any rejection and resentment of the Spirit of Life’s children is a betrayal of our values, and a betrayal of the Spirit of Life.

We lament the crises of violence, environmental disaster, war, and poverty that cause families to leave their homes and lands in search of safety and asylum; we call for serious attention to fixing our broken immigration system; and we pray for just national and global policies and for the healing of a broken world — a prayer for *Tikkun olam* — so that all people might have the opportunity to find safety and welcoming in our country, our state, and in our Long Island communities. This is who we are as people of faith.

Respectfully,

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| Right Reverend Lawrence Provenzano, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island | Sister Elizabeth Hill, CSJ, President Emerita, St. Joseph’s University, Sister of St. Joseph, of Brentwood | Rabbi Lina Zerbarini, Kehillath Shalom Synagogue, Cold Spring Harbor and member of the Suffolk County Human Rights Commission |
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| Sr. Peggy McVetty, OP, Prioress, Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville | The Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches | Sr. Karen Burke, CSJ, Leadership Council, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood |
| John Lutterbie, President, and the Board of Trustees, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Stony Brook | Sadri Altinok, President, Turkish Cultural Center of Long Island | Rev. Michael Dobbs, Zen Buddhist Ocean Zendo |
| Rev. Erik Rasmussen, Chair, Board of Trustees, Long Island Council of Churches | Sr. Janet Kinney, CSJ, Director, Long Island Immigration Clinic, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood | Rabbi Stephen Wise Goodman, Garden City Jewish Center |
| Vicar Jean Dougherty, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Smithtown | Cristian Murphy, Director, Justice, Peace and Care for Creation, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood | Sr. Emily Masse, OP, Justice, Peace and Care for Creation, Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville |
| Rev. Ron Garner, Pastor, Wantagh Memorial Congregational Church | Rev. Marie Tatro, Canon for Community Justice Ministry, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island | Claire Deroche, Social Justice Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock |
| Claire Deroche, Chair, Public Issues Committee, Long Island Council of Churches | Rabbi Paul Sidofsky, Temple Isaiah, Stony Brook | Rev. Kate Salisbury, Canon for Christian Education, Cathedral of the Incarnation, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island |
| Rabbi Ian Silverman, East Northport Jewish Center | Mageline McClaron, Church Business Administrator, Memorial Presbyterian Church, Roosevelt and Commissioned Ruling Elder, Presbytery of Long Island | Rev. Lilo Carr Rivera, Assistant Rector, St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Sayville |
| Rabbi Linda Henry Goodman, Garden City Jewish Center | Rev. Duncan Burns, Pastor, St. John's Episcopal Church, Huntington | Rev. Dr. Debra W. Haffner, Interim Minister, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Huntington |

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| Jack Finkenberg, Social Justice Chair, Bay Shore Unitarian Church | Rev. Dr. Madeline Campbell, Interim Minister, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Stony Brook | Linda Olson, Sisters of St. Joseph Agrégée, Justice Committee Coordinator |
| Sr. Margaret Secour, CSJ, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood | Sr. Elaine Jahrsdoerfer, OP, Pastoral Services and Liturgy, Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville | Missy Androu, Social Justice, St. Anthony RC Church, oceanside |
| Carol Werblin, Chair, Social Action Committee, Temple Beth El, Huntington | Joseph Gibbons, President of the Board, Gerald Ryan Outreach Center, Wyandanch | Dennis Laderwager, Moderator, Mt. Sinai Congregational Church |
| Pastor Amy Fortunato, Reformed Church of America, Port Washington (ret.) | Rev. William Brisotti, Pastor Emeritus, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal RC Church, Wyandanch | Richard Koubek, Roundtable for the Common Good, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal RC Church, Wyandanch |
| Alexis Stafford, Roundtable for the Common Good, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal RC Church, Wyandanch | Thomas Lyon, Mount Sinai Congregational Church | Sr. Donna Herrington, Associate, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood |
| Sr. Margie Kelly, Parrish Outreach Director, Holy Name of Mary RC Church, Valley Stream | Rev. Evelyn P. Avila, Mission Developer, Ascension Lutheran Church, Deer Park | Mary Freidman, St. Thomas More RC Church, Hauppauge |
| Sr. Judy Fay, CSJ, Community Life Coordinator, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood | Helen Boxwill, Social justice Ministry Co-Chair, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Huntington | Msgr. Ronald Richardson, Diocese of Rockville Centre (ret.) |
| Rev. Vanessa Winters, United Church of Christ, Westhampton Beach | Rev. Charlince Vendredy, Pastor, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal RC Church, Wyandanch | Alma Alegria, Director, Centro Corazon de Maria, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Westhampton Beach |

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| Diana Weaving, Social Justice Ministry, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Huntington | Maria Struder, Presbytery of Long Island | Msgr. John Cervini, Diocese of Rockville Centre, (ret.) |
| Bonnie Schlagel, Peace and Justice Committee, Setauket Presbyterian Church | Eleanor Krebs, St. James RC Church, Seaford | Linda Obernauer, Setauket Presbyterian Church |
| Jill Marcus, Social Justice Ministry, Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock | Carolann Masone, OP Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville | Margaret Galiardi, OP, Spiritual Director, Retreat Leader, and Educator, Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville |
| Michele Boccia, Certified Catholic Chaplain | Sr. Rosalie Carven, CSJ, Nonviolence Committee | John McNamara, Caritas Coordinator, St. Louis de Montfort RC Church, Sound Beach |
| Deborah Little, Director of Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Stony Brook | | Rev. Joann Barrett, Senior Officiant/Founder, Gathering of Light Fellowship, Huntington |
| Sr. Mary Beth Moore, SC, Sisters of Charity, Halifax | Bill Kiley, St John's Episcopal Church, Huntington | Sister Betty Toohig, Sister of Charity, East Islip |
| Rev. Robert Pierce, (ret.) Sayville Congregational United Church of Christ | David Pinkowitz, Temple Beth Torah. Melville | Rev. Juan Pastor Reyes, Pastor, Church of the Messiah, Central Islip and Christ Church, Brentwood, Episcopal Diocese of LI |
| Mark Hussey, Roundtable for the Common Good, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal RC Church, Wyandanch | Rev. James Rea, Pastor, Bethany Presbyterian Church, Huntington Station | Sr. Eileen McCann, CSJ, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood |

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| Rev. Matthew T. Means, Presbyterian Church (USA) | Reverend Wade Pond Pastor - Presbyterian Church of Sweet Hollow, Presbyterian Church USA | Peggy Fort Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Stony Brook and Building Bridges Brookhaven |
| Rev. Robert Smith, Pastor St. Hugh of Lincoln RC Church, Huntington Station | Susan Cushman, Garden City Community Church | Rev. Kirk Reynolds, S.J. Associate Pastor, St. Anthony's R.C. Church Oceanside |
| Sandy Thomas, Chair, Roundtable for the Common Good, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal RC Church, Wyandanch | Heather Kress, Social Justice Chair, St. John's Episcopal Church, Huntington | Luis Valenzuela, Long Island Council of Churches |
| Sr. Kathleen Hickey, CSJ Sister of St. Joseph Brentwood, NY | Sister Diane Capuano, O.P., Dominican Sisters of Amityville | Marge Spinella, Roundtable for the Common Good, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal RC Church, Wyandanch |
| Muriel Farkas, Temple Beth Torah, Melville | Sr. Mary Nolan, OP, Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville | Sr. Diane Morgan, OP, Councilor, Sisters of St. Dominic of Amityville |
| Shanti Flot, Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock | Rev. Ned Wight, Unitarian Universalist, Roslyn, NY | Ellie Austin, Dix Hills Jewish Center, Dix Hills |
| Sr. Patricia Hanvey, OP, Sister of St. Dominic, Amityville | Sr. Lenore Toscano, OP, Sisters of St Dominic Amityville | Nikki Willard, Social Justice Co-Chair, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Huntington |
| Miriam Hirsch, Social Action, Temple Beth Torah, Melville | Elaine Learnard, on behalf of Conscience Bay Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends | Rev. Dr. Timothy TenClay, Community Reformed Church in Manhasset |

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| Rev. Richard Witt, Executive Director, Rural and Migrant Ministries | JJ TenClay, Refugee Ministries Coordinator, Reformed Church in America Global Mission | Rev. Jimmie Sue Deppe, Rector, Episcopal Church of St. Jude, Wantagh |
| Sr. Barbara Schwarz, OP, Dominican Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville | The Rev. Nell Archer, Vicar Iglesia de la Santa Cruz and Bushwick A)bey, Episcopal Diocese of Long Island | The Reverend Dr. Chloe Breyer, Executive Director, Interfaith Center of New York |
| Brennan Brink,, Migrant Shelter and Asylee Consultant, Interfaith Center of New York | Rashida Tyler, Deputy Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches | Sr. Theresa McDermott, OP, Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville |
| Edward Kubik, Coordinator, Pax Christi Long Island | Rabbi Jeffrey Clopper, Huntington | Susan Steinmann, Poor People's Campaign - LI Region |
| Susan Karbiner, Social Justice Committee Member, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Huntington | Jum Morgo, Our Lady of the Snow RC Church, Blue Point | Sr. Margaret Schmit, OP, Sisters of St. Dominic, Amityville |
| The Rev. Fr. Gerardo Romo-Garcia, Bishop's Vicar for Hispanic Ministry at the East End, Diocese of Long Island | Terese Wildrick, Neighbors in Support of Immigrants Steering Committee Chair | Paula Klein, Social Action Committee of Temple Beth El, Huntington |
| Sr. Alice O'Shaughnessy CSJ, MD, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood | Sr. Lauren Hanley, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood | Susan Dewey-Hammer, United Methodist, Cold Spring Harbor |
| Jacqueline (Jacqui) Jill Rito, Pax Christi Long Island | Rabbi Marcey Wagner Spiritual leader, Chavurat Emet, Smithtown | Yakup Akyol, Turkish Cultural Center of Long Island |
| Sr. Susan Wilcox, CSJ, Sisters of St. Joseph, Brentwood | Carol Nesbitt, Lector, Our Lady of Fatima RC Church, Port Washington | Rabbi Susie Heneson Moskowitz, Temple Beth Torah-Melville |

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| Rev. Ken Graham, Presbytery of Long Island | Canon Juan Quevedo- Bosch, retired Rector of the Church of the Redeemer, Astoria. | |
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