

YOU SHALL ALSO LOVE THE STRANGER

Public Witness and For-Profit Immigration Detention

INTRODUCTION

Many of us hold Deuteronomy 10:19 in our hearts: to love the stranger. Showing this teaching in our daily individual and communal lives takes many forms. The issue of for-profit immigration detention is a contemporary challenge.

This resource describes the issue, offers Bible study to deepen exploration, and suggests action steps for our public witness in love.

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SECTION 1: The Issue and a Lutheran Lens

“Behind Every Immigration Case Is a Human Being”

“A small but determined group of faith leaders and community members gathered outside the Adelanto ICE Processing Center in Adelanto, Calif., on Oct. 11 to pray for the release of Evi Sarlita Sihomping, a longtime member of Getsemani Indonesian Lutheran Ministry in Riverside, Calif. ... Sihomping, who has lived in the United States for 20 years, was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at her home in Loma Linda, Calif., on June 7 and remains in custody while her immigration case is pending.

“For Robert Waworuntu, pastor of Getsemani Indonesian, Sihomping’s case is a personal and spiritual call to action. ‘Behind every immigration case is a human being — a mother, a wife, a member of a faith community,’ he said. ‘We want ICE officials and the wider public to see her humanity and recognize that immigration policies should be guided by empathy rather than punishment.’”

—Living Lutheran, [“Faith, justice and solidarity”](#) (November 2025)

What Is Private, For-Profit Immigration Detention?

While faith leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) gathered outside the Adelanto Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Processing Center, GEO Group — the private prison company that runs the facility — reported record profits and new multimillion-dollar contracts with the U.S. government to expand immigration detention facilities like it across the country.

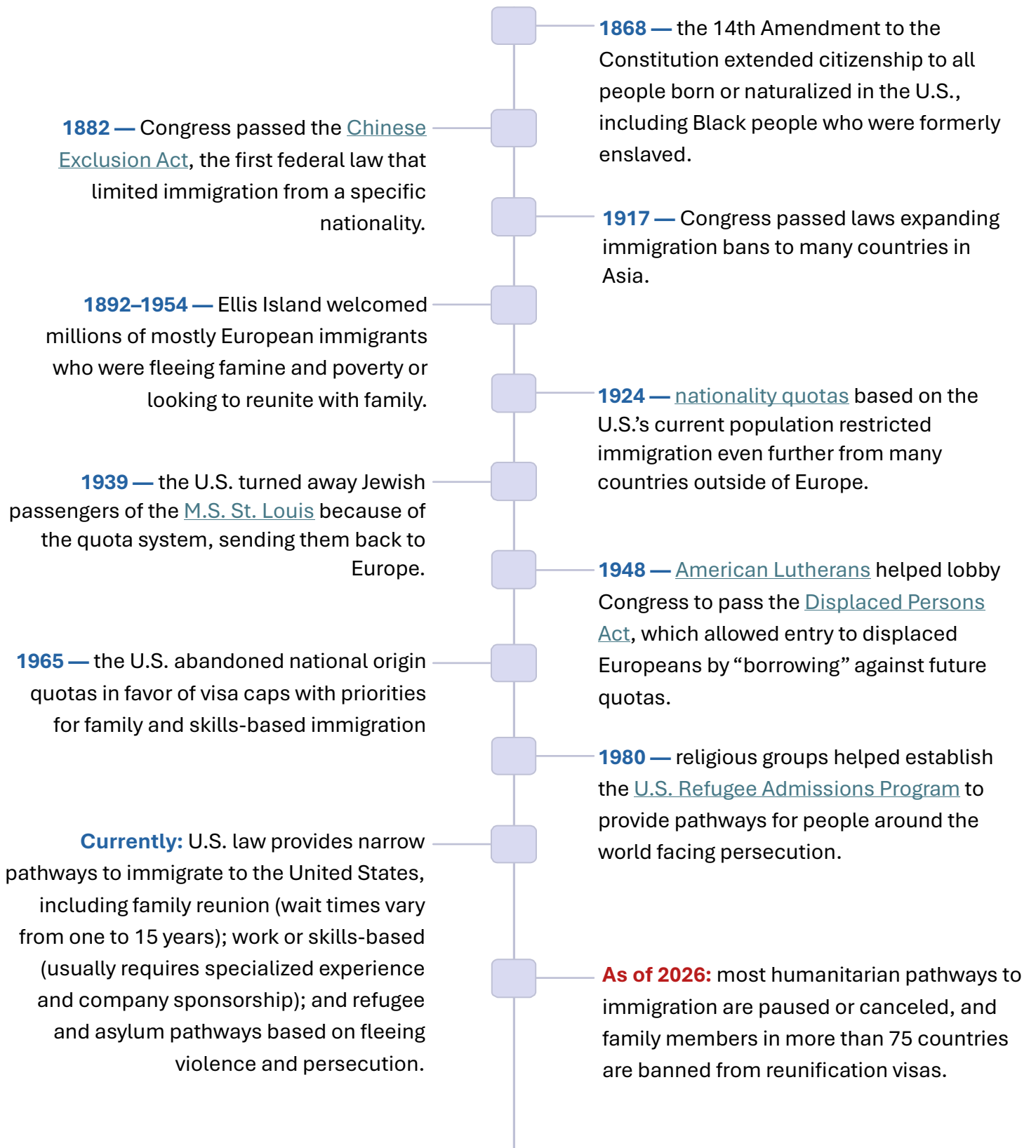
Nearly **90% of people in ICE custody** are held in private, for-profit facilities run by companies such as GEO Group and CoreCivic, according to the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse. With detention rates and federal funding soaring, **the industry has never been more profitable.**

How Did We Get Here?

Every country sets rules that determine who may enter and what legal status individuals hold while they are there. Arresting or detaining immigrants is a policy choice.

U.S. immigration policy has shifted over the past 250 years, from the Naturalization Act of 1790, which allowed any “free white person of good character” to apply for citizenship, to gradual expansions and exclusions of different groups based on race, experience or nation of origin.

A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy



After decades of strict caps for immigration from most countries in Asia, Africa and Central/South America, President Lyndon Johnson ended national origin quotas for immigration in 1965, calling the preference “un-American.” He replaced it with a system that prioritized family reunification and skilled workers. The official quota of immigrants remained insufficient to meet the U.S.’s demand for labor, however, and many people came to the United States without documents in order to work.

For the past century, the United States has lived in tension — on the one hand, maintaining laws that prohibit any but a few narrow pathways for legal immigration and citizenship, and on the other, relying on undocumented immigrant labor for economic growth, particularly in critical fields such as agriculture, construction and manufacturing.

For much of U.S. history, the U.S. government has looked the other way while immigrants without documents performed critical work, paid taxes and raised families in this country. Lacking legal status in the United States is a civil, not criminal, offense. Other examples of civil offenses include traffic tickets, noise ordinance violations or failure to renew a business license. The United States does not usually send people to prison for civil offenses, and, legally, immigration detention centers are not prisons, despite their similarities. Additionally, immigrants in detention have generally not been accused of a crime. A [recent study](#) found that 63% of people detained in immigrant detention centers had no criminal convictions whatsoever, and 93% had no violent convictions. Despite this, detained immigrants have even fewer protections than those sentenced to prison.

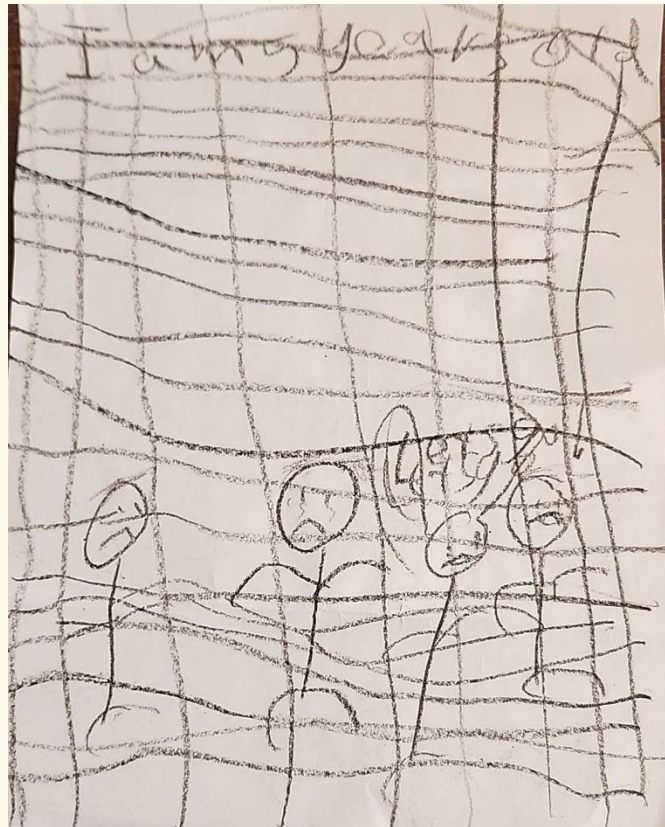
Prison vs. Immigration Detention: Key Differences

PRISON	IMMIGRATION DETENTION
Punishment for a criminal offense.	Process-related holding as part of removal or asylum proceedings — it is not supposed to be punishment.
Statutory protections under the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) and other laws.	No statutory protections.
Follows a court trial and conviction during which there was a right to a government-appointed lawyer.	Holds people without a court trial, with no guarantee of legal support.
Approximately 8% of state and federal prison populations are held in facilities managed by private, for-profit companies.	Over 90% of the immigration detention population are held in detention facilities run by private, for-profit companies.

Children in Detention

Because immigration detention facilities are treated differently from prisons, U.S. law allows children of all ages to be detained in conditions often indistinguishable from prison. Some of these children, held with their parents, are U.S. citizens.

As of February 2026, most children are being held in Dilley Immigration Processing Center in Texas, a facility run by the company CoreCivic. ICE has placed [at least 3,800 children](#) into detention since the beginning of 2025, with at least 1,000 children held longer than 20 days and some for months. Children in detention face deteriorating health, limited access to schooling, play and the outdoors. Children’s caretakers report lasting trauma from their time in detention.



“I am 5 years old,” a little girl writes on a drawing of her family behind bars”

— “Let us go.” Courtesy of Eric Lee, Lee & Godshall-Bennett, LLP via The Marshall Project

From Private Prison to Private Detention

The business of detaining migrants is not new. For example, at the turn of the 20th century, the U.S. government paid sheriffs to house Chinese immigrants in county jails. The industry as we know it today, however, began in the 1980s when shifting immigration policy led the U.S. government to turn to private prison companies to detain immigrants arriving from Latin America and the Caribbean.

Immigration detention companies typically enter contracts with the U.S. government and receive a set fee per detainee per night. Some argue that these private contracts are more cost-effective and flexible than government-run facilities. Others point out that detention for profit creates perverse financial incentives to detain more people for longer without guaranteeing minimum standards of care.

The two largest private immigration detention companies in the United States began as private prison companies. Over the past few decades, as the U.S. prison population increased, the U.S. government increasingly relied on private business to house people accused of and convicted of crimes. These businesses were accused of cutting corners to save money, putting the health and well-being of detainees at risk, which led the Obama administration to commit to phasing out private prisons in 2016. The following Trump administration reversed this decision in 2020. Despite the overall decline in federal use of private prisons, the revenue of the two major private prison companies increased as they transitioned to private migration detention.

Immigration detention saw an enormous influx of funding in July 2025 after Congress [passed a bill](#) that provided \$45 billion for detention — 10 times higher than the entire detention budget for 2024. At the same time, the deployment of ICE to major cities across the United States, increasingly aggressive immigration enforcement, and the end of alternatives to detention such as supervised release programs resulted in a record number of people being sent to detention facilities. As of early 2026, [over 73,000 immigrants](#) are detained.

In 2025 and 2026, for-profit private prison companies such as CoreCivic and GEO Group won no-bid, multimillion-dollar contracts with ICE. The companies had already come under fire for inadequate conditions in their prisons and immigrant detention facilities. For example, a group of detained immigrants sued CoreCivic for forcing them to work for just \$1 a day in a “voluntary work program” that was not in fact voluntary, as they alleged refusing the work meant being punished with solitary confinement. These allegations continued, with reports of overcrowding, [unsanitary and unsafe](#) conditions, and lack of access to family, legal counsel and even [religious expression](#). Some people [have died](#) in immigration detention. In some cases, U.S. citizens, often targeted because of their race or appearance, have also been [detained](#).

ELCA Social Teaching on Private Prisons and Detention

ELCA social teaching on immigration recognizes the need both for immigration laws and enforcement, and for just and humane treatment of all people arriving to and within our borders.

“We recognize the right of all countries to control their borders and their duty to protect their citizens from the illegal entry of drugs and criminals. But we have serious doubts about the rightness and effectiveness of current policy (1998, under President Clinton) to erect imposing barriers between the United States and Mexico. We support the search for alternatives to this policy that would more appropriately reflect the relationship of two friendly nations whose peoples and economies are increasingly

interdependent. Whatever the policy, border enforcement should always respect the human dignity of persons attempting to cross the border.”

— [Immigration](#) social statement (1998)

“Governing authorities are to seek justice, foster peace, protect people, and support their well-being. This church therefore acknowledges the rule of law and the role of government in facilitating orderly migration and integration, and in preventing migration that might be dangerous or harmful to host communities. The law must be just, governance must be good, and enforcement must be humane.”

— [“Toward Compassionate, Just, and Wise Immigration Reform”](#) social policy resolution (2009)

Private detention has long been a concern of the ELCA. In its 2013 social statement [The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries](#), the ELCA urges the end of prison privatization:

“Arguments used in favor of for-profit prisons cite their supposed cost-effectiveness, their ability to reduce overcrowding in public prisons and the introduction of free market competition to lower incarceration costs overall. Recent decades have witnessed a dramatic trend toward the usage and spread of private, for-profit prisons. The arguments against them, however, are much stronger, and, for this church include concerns that are theological, moral and economic. Theologically speaking, it is the role of government to restrain evil, not that of the market”

— Page 43–44

“Where individual lives depend utterly upon the system and as one comes closer to matters of life and death, it is of utmost importance that the state not abdicate its responsibilities. When the state incarcerates someone as a prisoner, it brings upon itself special responsibilities for exercising custodial control. For this moral reason the role of the state in the operation of prisons should not be supplanted by economic players who are guided primarily by profit or production.”

— Page 44

The same concerns about profit motives, due process and human dignity led the ELCA to screen out private immigration detention companies from its pension and investment funds

“Economically speaking, the church holds that privatizing the criminal justice system creates an economic incentive for for-profit corporations to expand incarceration and detention, treating humans as a commodity to be sold rather than children of God who are never beyond restoration. This incentive may also manifest itself in practices that can become serious human rights abuses such as attempts to keep costs down through inadequate medical and mental health care, insufficient basic hygiene, and inadequate staffing.”

— [Private Prison Screen](#) (2015)

In a 2009 [social policy resolution](#), the ELCA supports alternatives to all forms of immigrant detention, highlighting the harms that people in detention experience:

“Most detainees lack legal counsel, and many suffer from overcrowding, inadequate medical and mental health care, vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse, and neglect, leading in some cases to death. Detention also imposes heavy financial and emotional costs on families living without the support of the detained person.”

— [Social Policy Resolution](#) (2009)

Because of these harms, the ELCA:

“[S]upports increasing the use of more humane, less costly, and more effective alternatives to detention, such as supervised release programs,” noting, *“When detention is necessary, compliance with humane standards and access to vital services must be ensured at every facility housing detainees.”*

Learn More

- **LISTEN TO** [“The Business of Migrant Detention,”](#) NPR Throughline.
- **READ** [A Short History of Immigration Detention](#), Freedom for Immigrants.
- **READ** [letters](#) and **HEAR** [firsthand accounts of detention](#) from “The Children of Dilley,” ProPublica.
- **READ** [“Private Prison Companies’ Enormous Windfall: Who Stands to Gain as ICE Expands,”](#) Brennan Center for Justice.
- **READ** ELCA social teaching, including [“Toward Compassionate, Just, and Wise Immigration Reform”](#) and [The Church and Criminal Justice](#).

SECTION 2: Bible Study

Introduction

What guidance can we find in Scripture to help us think about private immigration detention? Even though the modern form of privately owned detention centers to imprison migrants is not something that appears in the Bible, the theme of migration appears throughout Scripture.

The story of Abraham and Sarah begins with them migrating from their ancestral lands to a new, promised land, facing both perils and blessings along their journey.

Jacob and his family migrate to Egypt because of a famine and are at first received with open arms, thanks to Joseph. Generations later, Egyptian leaders oppress and enslave Jacob's descendants because they are considered aliens in the land. God hears the Israelites' cry and liberates them with mighty acts through the leadership of Moses, Miriam and Aaron — and once again the Bible gives us a story of migration as the Israelites journey through the desert for 40 years.

When Ruth and Naomi lose their husbands and face famine in their home, Ruth tells her mother-in-law: "Where you go, I will go ... your people shall be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

Generations later, after Israel was established under David's and Solomon's leadership, the kingdom is attacked by the Assyrians and Babylonians. The Israelites once again find themselves strangers in a strange land.

The holy family also had the experience of migration, first when Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census, and then in their journey as refugees of the infanticidal violence unleashed by Herod.

Those experiences of migration — the joys and difficulties that went along with it, the experience of alienation and oppression, and God's acts of liberation — were foundational for the way the people may have understood themselves and how they lived out their faith and organized their society. The book of Deuteronomy puts it like this:

"You shall make this response before the Lord your God: 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.' You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God. Then you,

together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house”

— (Deuteronomy 26:5–11)

This passage helps us understand a biblical worldview toward migrants, resident aliens or “strangers,” as it is sometimes translated. Against the very human tendency to perceive those who are different from us (the “stranger”) as potentially dangerous, the Scriptures direct us to remember that “they” are us and that “we” are them.

Rooted in the witness of the Scriptures, Lutheran theology teaches that one consequence of humans’ fall into sin is that we become more concerned about ourselves than about our neighbors (“curved in on ourselves” is the image that Martin Luther borrowed from Augustine). By grace, through faith, Christ sets us free to love, so that we are now able to entrust our well-being to God and dedicate ourselves to the well-being of our neighbors, especially those who are most vulnerable, marginalized or oppressed (see the study guide for [The Freedom of a Christian](#).)

Different relevant biblical texts offer instruction for prayerful discernment about what God’s word is saying to us to illuminate our present situation and to guide our actions.

Prayer

Lord, open your word that we may hear your voice speaking to us in it, and open our minds and hearts to receive what you want us to hear. Grant us the guidance of your Holy Spirit to order our lives according to your will. We humbly ask you these things in the name of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Reflecting on Hebrews 13:2

Hebrews 13:2

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Questions for Reflection

- Who is this text talking about? Who in the Bible entertained angels without knowing it by showing hospitality to “strangers”? (See Genesis 18:1–15.)
- What does it mean to show hospitality (as an individual, household, community and a nation)? What are concrete ways in which hospitality is shown?

- In what ways is showing hospitality as an individual similar to showing it as a nation? How is it different?
- What does it mean to neglect to show hospitality (as an individual, household, community and a nation)?
- What does it mean to be a stranger? Reflect on a time when you or your community showed hospitality to strangers. What did you learn?
- How does this biblical text speak to the question of private immigration detention facilities? How does it speak to you and your community?

Reflecting on Deuteronomy 10:19

Deuteronomy 10:19

“You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Questions for Reflection

- Recalling the history of your ancestors and how you came to be in the land where you now live: Where did your ancestors come from? What was their equivalent of “Egypt” (e.g., hardship, scarcity, oppression, forced displacement)?
- What was their experience of being strangers in a strange land? How were they able to survive or even thrive?
- What customs did your family bring from their family of origin? Do you feel homesick when you are not at home?
- What does it mean in our context to “love the stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt”? What are concrete ways you and your community are called to love the stranger?
- How does this text speak about the issue of private migration detention facilities?

Historical Sidenote: Suspicion of the Stranger in U.S. History

We have experienced suspicion of the stranger in U.S. history. Irish Catholic migration during the mid-19th century due to the potato famine in Ireland prompted significant anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic backlash that persisted throughout the next century to haunt the election of the first Catholic president. Predecessor church bodies of the ELCA made statements on the loyalty of presidential candidate John F. Kennedy that can only be considered embarrassing today. During World War II, Japanese Americans were removed from their homes and workplaces and moved into internment camps in large numbers, without evidence that they posed any kind of threat to national security. During World War I, German Lutheran parochial schools found themselves under threat of closure and censure from the state for teaching German.

The causes of migration are many. Chinese workers who built the railroads in the 19th century were subject to the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first federal legislation targeting an ethnic group. They were trying to escape civil war. Irish migrants fled a potato famine that killed more than 10% of the population while the British Empire exported food off the starving island. By 1920, Norway had sent about one-third of its population to the United States, a higher proportion than any country except Ireland. Famine, overpopulation and industrialization that led to significant unemployment drove Norwegians to migrate. In the 1970s, 1 million people fled El Salvador to escape political repression and violence in a civil war funded partially by the United States.

Civil war, famine and violence still prompt migration now, but policy choices around immigration have become extremely restrictive and punitive. Fear of the stranger makes us vulnerable to harmful false assumptions, eroding empathy and clouding our judgment.

Churches have long acted as repositories of memory and culture. Members bring ethnic dishes to potlucks, sing hymns written centuries ago in another language, and participate in traditions such as Santa Lucia or Las Posadas. When Lutherans began arriving in the United States, churches held worship services in their native language and acted as a nexus of mutual aid and comfort.

Reflect on the history of migration in our country (voluntary and forced). In what ways has our country been shaped by migration? How were (are) Native peoples affected by that history? What lessons can we learn from those experiences?

Reflecting on Hebrews 13:3

Hebrews 13:3

“Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.”

Empathy is the uniquely human ability to feel what others are feeling, to place ourselves in another person’s situation. It might have been enough for the author of Hebrews to simply say, “Remember those who are in prison.” Instead the author added: “as though you yourselves were in prison.”

Questions for Reflection

- Empathy is the uniquely human ability to feel what others are feeling, to place ourselves in another person’s situation. It might have been enough for the author of Hebrews to simply say, “Remember those who are in prison and those who are

being tortured.” Instead the author added: “as though you yourselves were in prison or being tortured.”

- a. What difference does that addition make?
 - b. What difference does empathy make, as opposed to simply remembering or thinking about someone?
- Being mindful not to trigger traumatic memories, reflect on testimonials of people who have been imprisoned, especially, but not exclusively, in private immigration detention centers. Take a moment to imagine yourself going through that experience or, alternatively, imagine your child, grandchild, nephew, niece, etc., in that situation.
 - a. What feelings did you experience?
 - b. What thoughts came to mind?
 - c. What needs did you experience?Now do the same but add the element of “torture” to the experience. (Keep in mind that torture can happen in many ways. It can include solitary confinement or being in extremely hot or cold environments for extended periods of time, violently separating a child from their caregivers, slamming people against walls, depriving people from needed medication or treatment, etc. Now think about what difference it would make, under those circumstances, to know that there are people who are “remembering” you (or your loved one) as if they themselves were there with you, praying for you and finding ways to aid you.
 - d. What does that feel like?
 - What do we do beyond feeling empathy? Based on this verse, how can we be in solidarity with those who are in prison? If it was you or someone you love in this position, how would you want others to be in solidarity?
 - How are hospitality to strangers and solidarity with those imprisoned interrelated? Why are they right next to each other in Hebrews?

Something Extra: Reflecting on “The Freedom of a Christian”

In a succinct tract written in 1520, Luther had much to say on Christian freedom. Read his [The Freedom of a Christian](#) and/or [The Freedom of a Christian: A Study Guide](#). His perspective includes:

“Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.”

Question for Reflection

- How does this text speak about the issue of private migration detention facilities?

Reflecting on Exodus 20:16

Exodus 20:16

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

From Luther’s Small Catechism: *“What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead, we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”*

Questions for Reflection

- How have you heard immigrants discussed in the news or public discourse? Is any of this discourse “false witness”?
- Why does it matter whether lies are told about our neighbors or about us?
- What lies are being told about immigrants?
- In what ways is “bearing false witness” being used to support the detention of migrants in private detention centers?
- What are “false witnesses” about private detention centers and their supporters that we need to examine and be honest about?
- In what other ways does this text speak to the issue of private migration detention centers?

Biblical Challenges and Private Migration Detention

Over and over again, the Bible challenges us to see the face of God in the prisoner, in the stranger, in someone who is hungry or ill or needy. In meeting that challenge, we connect with the grace that God shows us — we become little Christs to each other.

When we treat the stranger as someone who does not bear the face of God to us — someone without humanity, without their own story, language and traditions — we ignore that challenge. Instead of seeing them as bearing the face of God, we see them as the face of fear.

Some news coverage of arrests dehumanizes migrants, referring to a tattoo as a gang sign or focusing on a minor arrest as if these aspects describe their whole person. Other coverage talks about the family left behind, the impact people have on a community, describing the fullness of their humanity. When we remove people from their stories, it becomes harder to empathize and easier to justify mistreatment. When we connect people to their stories, we see what we hold in common.

Questions for Reflection

- What other biblical texts or theological teachings do you find helpful in addressing the challenges of private migration detention facilities?
- What have you learned from this study? In what ways has your thinking about this issue changed?
- What concrete actions could your community take to address this issue?
- What commitments are you ready to make to address this issue?


SECTION 3: What Can You Do?

Take Your Money Out of Private Immigration Detention Centers

Is your money going to support private immigration detention facilities? If you own stocks or are invested in a mutual fund or retirement fund, there's a good chance that you are invested in the companies behind private prisons and immigration detention facilities.

One way to assess your funds is to use <https://prisonfreefunds.org/>, a tool maintained by one of the ELCA's corporate social responsibility partners. Enter the name of your fund manager and their funds will appear, including an assessment of categories like borders and private prisons.

The same website includes a tool kit (<https://prisonfreefunds.org/action-toolkit>) that helps individuals seek out the right person to give them information on their investments, as well as a proposed template for writing to their investment advisers for more information. Remember — they work for you, and it's your money. You get to choose where to invest it. Faced with pressure, some pension funds [may divest](#) from negatively viewed industries like private prisons.

 **Action Step:** Review your retirement account or other investments — are they invested in a socially responsible fund that avoids investments like prisons? Consider what investments are available and schedule a call with a financial adviser who can help you understand your options to invest in a way that aligns with your values.

Ask Institutions Not to Invest in Detention


Not everyone owns stocks or similar investments, but you can still have influence with large institutions or organizations you are connected with. Nearly every large institution has an endowment, and endowments have investments. Your institution of higher learning, your synod or your church may outsource management of that endowment to someone who may not follow the publicly articulated values of your institution when making investment decisions. But your voice matters! For example, students have forced divestment from private prisons at numerous universities, including [Columbia University](#) and Belmont University. They lobbied to have the CEO of CoreCivic resign from its board of trustees.

The ELCA's pension fund, Portico Benefit Services, applies ELCA social criteria investment screens, which means its social purpose funds do not invest in certain companies. None of Portico's funds are invested in CoreCivic or Geo Group, the two biggest corporations in the private prison industry. Portico also conducts dialogues with corporations around some of

their practices and files shareholder resolutions around topics such as the environment or human rights.

Did You Know? The ELCA's Portico Benefit Services

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the ELCA uses screening tools for investments, shareholder advocacy and community investing to work with corporations, calling on them to ensure that people are treated fairly and with dignity and to create sustainable communities. Based on ELCA social teaching, the CSR program develops the foundation for screening investments and engaging in shareholder advocacy.

 **Action Step:** If you are affiliated with an organization that holds an endowment, reach out to ask how the funds are invested. Consider who else in your organization may want to work with you to remind the organization to invest using their values.


Join Neighbors Calling for No Private Detention in Your Backyard


As the private immigration detention footprint has expanded across the country, cities, townships, counties and states have successfully pushed back against the construction and operation of facilities in their neighborhoods.

Pressure from advocates, including the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, an ELCA-affiliated state public policy office (SPPO), influenced a local company to back off from a sale of land to a private immigration detention company in Hanover, Va.

Cities like Kansas City, Mo., have [passed moratoriums](#) on detention facility permits. Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin have all [introduced bills](#) in their state legislatures to shut down immigration detention centers.

Advocates point to moral and faith concerns about the well-being of people in private detention, and also [raise concerns](#) about zoning, permits, property tax, water and gas lines, and lack of community consultation.

 **Action Step:** Reach out to local organizations through your synod, [SPPO](#) our other community connections to see what efforts are underway related to opposing private immigration detention. Efforts may include attendance at city council meetings or hearings, letter-writing campaigns or visits to your state legislature.

 **Action Step:** Is your community new to discussions about immigration detention? Consider starting with the private immigration detention Bible study and other resources related to ELCA social teaching. Where can you find common ground?

Additional ELCA Resources:

- ELCA social statement: [Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All](#) and [six-session study guide](#) .
- ELCA social message: “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy” ([English](#) and [Spanish](#)) and [A Study Guide for the Social Message on: Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy](#)
- Blog post: [“Addressing Polarization and Building Cohesion in Your Community.”](#)
- Blog post: [“Hard and Holy Work of Depolarization”](#) can also be a great discussion starter.
- *Living Lutheran* articles [“Seeing the human in each other: Conflict resolution skills used to bridge partisan divide”](#) and April 2024 [“News from ELCA Advocacy.”](#)

Advocate for People in Private Detention Nationwide

Congress sets laws governing how immigration detention operates and funds the Department of Homeland Security, which contracts with private companies to operate detention facilities. Congress also holds an important oversight role over the administration, which allows members to visit immigration detention facilities and press administration officials for data and information about how these facilities are run.

Together with coalitions of faith groups and concerned citizens nationwide, you can ask Congress to:

- Support alternatives to detention that enable immigrants with no criminal record to stay with their families and continue to work while their cases are being heard.
- End all detention of families and children.
- Where individuals remain in detention, ensure health, safety, and access to counsel, religious services and family visits.
- Phase out the use of private immigration detention facilities, and in the meantime, require strict oversight and nonrenewal of contracts for companies convicted of failure to meet people’s needs or of human rights abuses.
- Ensure funding for the Department of Homeland Security Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman, charged with oversight of safe detention conditions.

Stay Connected

Learn more about the ELCA's migrant ministry, [AMMPARO](#), and connect your church or synod to work accompanying and advocating on behalf of migrants.

Follow ELCA Witness in Society for advocacy and public witness opportunities on socials (@ELCAadvocacy) and by [signing up for the network](#).