



Neighborhood Unitarian  
Universalist Church

## The Borders of Humanity

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Just over three weeks ago, I heeded the call from the Standing on the Side of Love campaign and joined hundreds other UU's, clergy and lay people, and local activists in Phoenix for the National Day of Non Compliance, standing against SB1070.

It was 90 degrees (at least) and an unusual 70% humidity in Phoenix. I stood on the curb facing city police in their riot helmets lined up in a blockade formation, surrounding the "Human Rights Zone" created by about 20 people and a giant banner in the middle of a downtown intersection—a deliberate and intentional act of civil disobedience. We chanted "arrest Arpaio, not the people" and "when human rights are under attack, what do we do? Stand up! Fight back!" And then the tears came as I watched police arrest my fellow UU's, my friends, and our clergy. They had made this conscious choice to risk arrest, along with 60+other brave souls around the city, in a commitment to direct action.

But I could not ignore the sheer intensity and sadness about the issue that had brought us to this moment and it came swelling up while the tears streamed down. I chose not get arrested, so I stood safely on the curb, bearing witness, sending love into the street until the police handcuffed and loaded up the last protester. I was forever changed in Phoenix, inspired and humbled by the courage of all involved and never more proud to be part of a faith who made it possible for so many of us to put that faith into action on the street!

I was born and raised in Tucson, AZ about 40 miles from the Mexican border. My married name is Sara Alvarado. When my husband and I moved to Los Angeles, his parents drove with us. Michael drove one car, his mother and I in another and his father drove our U-haul. Not thirty minutes after we left Tucson, at 7 o' clock in the morning; his father was pulled over for "looking tired". Really, looking tired? We were skeptical, we were fairly sure it had something to do with a tall, brown skinned man driving a moving truck. Luckily the officer let him go with no action taken. There *was no action to be taken*. My father-in-law is a native Tucsonan, coming from a long line of Hispanic Americans whose lineage can be traced back to the area of southern Arizona more than five generations. His ancestors have been in this country longer than mine.

There have only been two times when I have been ashamed to be from Arizona. The first time was when the then governor decided to abolish the Martin Luther King holiday. Thankfully, voters finally reinstated it. The second time is now, with the recent passing of SB1070, by far the harshest anti-immigration bill to come through a state legislature. Thanks to SB 1070, Arizona may as well fly a "You are not welcome" flag over its state capitol.

The opening paragraph of the bill states its intent is "attrition through enforcement" meaning to make the laws so strict, so severe and so far-reaching that it will cause undocumented immigrants to leave. It mandates that the police investigate and detain anyone who could reasonably be suspected of being an undocumented immigrant, making it a crime not to have papers proving your immigration status.

As you know, controversial sections, including the ones I just mentioned, were delayed from taking effect by the injunction of a federal judge, while she further reviews the merits of the case brought by the justice department.

But this is far from a victory. The damage has already been done. And the judge's ruling does not prevent law enforcement from making immigration inquiries; it merely does not require them. It puts discretion back into the hands of local law enforcement allowing them to continue to use that reasonable suspicion. So Sherriff Joe Arpaio of Arizona, and others like him across the country, can continue dehumanizing immigration sweeps and unlawful detainments made by racial profiling in targeted neighborhoods.

So my message today is intended to continue to fuel the fire for justice, to remind us we are in the midst of a humanitarian crisis in our country and it matters how we act. It matters how we treat people. I hope we keep this issue

in the forefront our political discourse and in the forefront of our own faith in action. Because when we stop talking about an issue, it can easily get forgotten in the busy details of our daily lives.

Several states are considering similar legislation, despite the court ruling. And supporters and lawmakers alike assure the public that this bill does not condone racial profiling, but the question remains, just how will the police determine that “reasonable suspicion” with regard to your status: perhaps by pulling you over for “looking tired.” Certainly not for the way you dress, the neighborhood you live in, if you have an accent, or the color of your skin. Certainly not.

As my father-in-law and many others can attest, racial profiling and discrimination have a long and dark history in Arizona and in this country, but legislation like this sends a message whether the language is in the bill or not. And really that is where the frustration begins – not with the specific language – but its implied intent, its message. A state sanctioned message that targets, marginalizes and casts “suspicion” over a particular group of people – a particular ethnic group. Haven’t we done enough of that in this country already? Because I am willing to bet that the white undocumented immigrants from northern Europe or Canada or Australia will not be questioned.

There is no denying that our immigration system is broken, that border states like Arizona & California face greater challenges presented by illegal immigration. But a broken system, broken by our own failure as a people and a government to address the real needs of our workforce and economy, does not mean we get to ignore human rights. It is not license to discriminate, intimidate or terrorize,

What Arizona has done – and what many other states are replicating--is to criminalize the issue of immigration, in effect to make working a crime, conflating the issues of violent crime with one’s legal status—lumping gang violence, drug trafficking, gun violence—and shoving it all under the umbrella of illegal immigration, implying that if we are “strict” with our immigration policies, that crime will go down, that “bad stuff” will go away. But we know that the bad stuff doesn’t go away and that all crime is not committed at the hands of illegal immigrants.

Some three hundred and fifty thousand people were imprisoned last year because of immigration violations—without having violated any other laws. ([truthout.org/1123096](http://truthout.org/1123096)) Legal immigration is a myth. Our legal paths to immigration are impossible to navigate, fraught with complications and roadblocks.

Treating immigrant workers as criminals (undocumented or not) does nothing more than create more dissension, more division, more isolation. **We know the reality is** that undocumented workers come to this country out of desperation, looking for work, for a better life. They cross the border at great risk to their health and their lives, often fleeing violence in their own countries, not looking to perpetrate violence in ours. **We know the reality is** that since the U.S. imposed NAFTA on our Neighbors to the south, big American agri-business pushed out the rural, independent Mexican farms, receiving huge subsidies from Congress while Mexican farmers received nothing, forcing them to find factory jobs in the city of which there were not enough, so they came here to find work. **We know the reality is** that our country was built on the backs of immigrants from diverse and rich cultures from which we benefit.

So yes, I am essentially saying, let’s not overlook our own country’s role in creating this immigration boom. A boom over which we now find ourselves wringing our hands, succumbed to insanity passing for legislation, ready to cast out “the other”. “Those people” “Them”. I really despise those words. I get so angry when I hear Arizonans tell people to come and see for themselves what “they” have done, how bad it is because of “them?” What exactly have they done besides build our homes, clean our houses and mow our lawns and pick our food? We UU’s work very hard to teach our children there is no “them” and “us”, that we are all special and we are all connected, we are all part of the human family, wherever you are, whoever you are.

And this is not just about Arizona. This is not just about immigrants. This is about a crisis in our humanity. One that calls for us to take stock, to examine our own place in this issue. It is complicated to be sure and we all have different opinions and feelings about the problems of immigration and how to solve them. And I don’t know what the solution is. But, it will not be found in sweeping generalizations, political sound bites or reasonable suspicion. And I do know we cannot afford to be silent.

Our faith has a long history of support for immigration rights beginning with migrant worker's rights in 1961 to its first call for immigration reform in 1963 to countless statements supporting central American refugees during the Sanctuary movement of the 1980's. Throughout the decades in dozens of resolutions, the Unitarian Universalist Association of congregations has affirmed that "all people—without regard to immigration status—deserve access to fair wages, education, housing, healthcare, and other social services; and that immigrants are at high risk for being denied basic rights and services and thus warrant our special support." Our UU faith reminds us that a person is "human" not "illegal".

Our faith calls us to action, calls us to the streets, calls us to honor human dignity, calls us to honor the connectedness of all people and to work for justice. It calls for compassion and love. In my experience, racial profiling is not known for its compassion, ICE raids are not known for being compassionate acts. Supporting human rights for all people, especially those most marginalized and vulnerable, is a core value of Unitarian Universalism.

But I can understand the fear. We are in an economic crisis and during times like these, it is understandable that people are a little nervous, even scared. There is this feeling of instability and uncertainty in our country. That feeling of can lead us to tighten our own personal borders. To turn inward, close our circles, tighten our belts and hold on to as much as we can for fear we might lose something, a job, a house, a way of life. And yet, it is precisely times like these when we need to tap into that inner courage to open up, reach out, to expand our borders and support our community. It is times like these when we need to band together and remind each other there is enough.

There is a story from the Christian Bible that reminds us of this and I was inspired to use this story when I heard it told at this year's general assembly by Rep. Keith Ellison, an African-American, Muslim, congressman from Minnesota. It is a story of one of the miracles of Jesus.

Jesus was talking to the multitudes one day and it got on around dinner time and he was getting tired. So he turned to his helpers and said, it's getting late, what do we have to feed these people? They said well we have a couple of fish and some barley loaves. And they turned to each other and looked to him and said, "it's not enough to feed all these people, you've got to send them home. It's not enough we can't help them, it's time to wrap it up." And Jesus didn't argue with them he just started handing out the food. And as the story goes, there was enough. There was enough.

Representative Ellison also shared this interpretation: reminding us that weren't there, that we don't know what happened. He suggests, maybe the people who were there saw there wasn't enough and they went home to get more food to share. Or maybe what happened is that the disciple's perception of scarcity was misinformed, and there was actually more than they understood there to be. Maybe there was abundance; maybe there was radical abundance though they saw scarcity. We don't know. But the story says after the meal, there was not just enough; there were leftovers!. And today there is enough.

It is a matter of perception—even a matter of faith. Give and you shall receive—even if you think you have nothing to give. We all have that extra loaf of bread, or dollar bill. We can find enough jobs, enough homes, enough hospitality to welcome those who seek a better life, who seek opportunity, who seek freedom.

We have inscribed this idea on a national icon of freedom, "Give me your tired your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . ."

So, what do we do? Because this is an issue that will require some doing. First, I think, we can listen. We can hear the stories and learn about the people in our community and lives who are affected by this issue. We can continue to open our doors to those who need our help, especially our church doors. We can provide shelter and food and all manner of services we can put our radical hospitality to work!

Second, we can get back to the streets – we can join the action. I was so fortunate to be able to participate in the Phoenix action and similar protests and rallies were held across the country. But one day is not enough. The fight continues in Arizona in what organizers are calling "The Summer of Human Rights: From Alabama to Arizona".

We can commit to direct action or civil disobedience whether we are chained outside the jailhouse door, supporting the action from the sidewalk, providing home hospitality, food, transportation or staying home to watch the kids (thank you honey), every role has value. Some argue that civil disobedience just makes people angrier, but in some part, that is the point. Our trainers reminded us that “No social justice movement in history has been successful without the strategic use of nonviolent direct action” ([www.ruckussociety.org](http://www.ruckussociety.org)).

Some say that civil disobedience doesn't work, that it won't make a difference. Well it is easy to be cynical, I know I have gone there, it is easy to be indifferent, I've been there too, but there is nothing easy about sitting on hot asphalt or being chained to a building in 90 degrees holding space as police converge on you. And our action in Phoenix, tied up the Sheriff's department, delaying planned immigration raids and disrupted business as usual in the city of Phoenix. It made a **real** difference. Civil disobedience in all of its various roles is a commitment to self-transformation, a commitment to practicing what we preach.

I am a firm believer in public witness, in being a voice behind an issue. All too often we think that our voice will not be enough, that it won't do any good. But if enough voices come together – change is made. At the very least we need to contribute to the conversation as a matter of principle and balance. Just like the issue of marriage equality, if we remain silent, the other side's message takes over, spreading fear, and hate, and separation. **We** must stand on the side of Love. And to be quite frank, it is those of us in the “majority” whose voices need to be heard. Those of us allies, white people, privileged people, citizens and residents of this great country who need to hold the mirror up to our fellow Americans and say this is not right—there is enough! We are all human. Todos somos Arizona!

May it be so. Amen.

**Benediction:**

For immigrant rights, for marriage equality, for human rights, we honor the dream of freedom so vital to this country with the full poem whose final words are inscribed on our national icon of freedom

“The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"