



# Reading the Beatitudes Under Executive Order

13767

*By Rose Marie Berger*

**O**UTSIDE, A HELICOPTER circles this DC neighborhood, a dog barks anxiously in the alley. Inside, a woman sits in a straight-backed chair, reading the Beatitudes. She adjusts her glasses. “*Bienaventurados los que lloran, porque ellos recibirán consolación.*” Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. “It’s a beautiful prayer,” she says.

My neighbor Lola cleans office buildings during the week, takes English classes on Saturdays, goes to Mass on Sundays. Her husband

operates a jackhammer for a construction crew. On the “Day Without an Immigrant,” Lola’s boss said, because it wasn’t organized by the union, workers should not stay home. So she went to work. Her husband stayed home. “We have to stand together,” he said.

Lola and her husband sometimes share their one-bedroom apartment with a man who was their neighbor in El Salvador. He works days, nights, weekends. He sleeps on a mattress in their main room for a few hours in the afternoon. Lola leaves *pupusas* for him, wrapped and warm. Sometimes he drinks too much, turns up the radio, dances. They quiet him so he doesn’t disturb the neighbors. He feels safe there.

A few miles from Lola’s apartment, Immigration and Customs Enforcement raided Rising Hope United Methodist Church (under President Obama, such “sensitive locations” were considered off-limits except in extreme cases). Men were rounded up as they left the church’s hypothermia shelter. They were detained and effectively “disappeared,” since church members have been unable to get any information about them from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials.

A few of Lola’s neighbors have attended meetings to learn what to do when ICE agents come to one’s home or work. They learn the differences between ICE paperwork that does not allow entry into a home and an official warrant, signed by a judge, that does. They learn how to sign over power of attorney to someone for the care of their children, should the parents be suddenly apprehended.

One of Lola’s neighbors believes ICE only patrols certain “federal” highways and has an elaborate route mapped out for getting to and from work. This is dangerously untrue—but in a slow-motion crisis, rumors fly and false hope is found in a thousand Facebook posts.

Five days after his inauguration, Mr. Trump announced that it would be his policy going forward to “secure the southern border of the United States through the immediate construction of a physical wall” and “detain individuals apprehended on suspicion of violating Federal or State law” (Executive Order 13767). While the first is primarily political theater and another reallocation of taxpayer funds to private industry, the second is tearing apart families and neighborhoods. And churches are defending their mixed immigration-status communities by reasserting their ancient, biblical “right of sanctuary”—that a consecrated place may offer protection to those fleeing justice or persecution. In the 1980s, American churches offered safe, but illegal,

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passage to people fleeing death squads in El Salvador. Today churches are shielding from deportation those already in the United States.

In March, twenty blocks from Lola's apartment, seventeen religious traditions launched the District, Maryland, and Virginia Sanctuary Congregation Network. Metropolitan AME Church's pastor, Rev. William H. Lamar IV, spoke at the press conference. "People ask why we stand with immigrants," he said. "Because black bodies have been assaulted since we first came to the States," he replied. "What we know is that if we are silent when brown bodies are assaulted, when gay bodies are assaulted, when trans bodies are assaulted, when female bodies are assaulted, then all of us remain imprisoned and in bondage."

"*Bienaventurados los que tienen hambre y sed de justicia,*" reads Lola, "*porque ellos serán saciados.*" Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. It is a beautiful prayer. •

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