

Sounding the Alarm

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*no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well.*

- Warsan Shire

Long before ordination or motherhood, my first ministry was nursing. This healing ministry remains the foundation of how I understand the world and the social ills of our time. Whether one is discussing physical, social, or spiritual dis-ease, there are causes and symptoms, and much too often our efforts focus predominantly on managing symptoms instead of eradicating root causes of disease.

This behavior comes to mind as I watch the unfolding outrage against a federal system that has lost track of 1,487 immigrant youth who crossed the southwest border of the US in recent years. Most of these children were placed with sponsors who were family members or friends. And yet, when calls were made to check on these children nearly 1,500 of them could not be located.

The possible reasons for these gaps in supervision range from everything to undocumented families ignoring federal contact for fear of deportation to children falling victim to human traffickers. Both are documented realities and both place innocent children, whose only crime is seeking better lives, in danger. The consequences are alarming and symptomatic of a deeper illness. We must sound the alarm.

Sounding the alarm at our borders and at our nation's Capital and in the public square is necessary because our children are not well. But sounding the alarm alone is not enough.

Thoughts and prayers alone are not enough. Protests alone are not enough. What might it look like to both sound the alarm on behalf of the children and work in ways that challenge policies that compel parents to risk sending their children across desert terrain alone in the first place?

I am mindful of the words of Somalian-British poet, Warsan Shire, who writes so poignantly in her poem, Home, of the perspective of those who risk their lives and

the lives of their children in search of refuge. Shire reminds us: no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land. I would also suggest that neither does anyone send their child across a desert alone if safety is possible at home.

I grieve global conditions that have made this so for 125,000 unaccompanied children since 2014.

I grieve policies that allow for the relaxation of background checks, home visits, and documentation of sponsors for the sake of expediency, and a system that abdicates both responsibility and accountability for those same children once they are placed. I grieve the documented difference between the treatment of unaccompanied Mexican children who are not allowed to stay in the US vs. Central American children who are granted some reprieve.

I grieve the children who will never see their parents again in a world that is not safe. As Shire reminds us, you only leave home when home won't let you stay.

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