

An Open Letter to the People of Alaska and to Our Elected Leaders

February 19, 2026

To our congregations, our neighbors, and those entrusted with public authority:

We write with grief, urgency, and moral clarity in response to the detention of a mother and her three children in Soldotna on Tuesday, February 17th. Immigration enforcement agents arrived in force, swarming a family home and taking into custody Sonia Espinoza Arriaga and her children, ages 5, 16, and 18. The youngest is a kindergartener. None have a criminal record. The husband and father, an American citizen born in Seward, was handcuffed outside his home in freezing temperatures.

We do not write to inflame. We do not write to obstruct lawful governance. We write because silence in the face of suffering is itself a form of consent.

In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded the Church that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." He cautioned religious leaders against preferring order over justice, and against patience that asks the vulnerable to endure harm quietly for the sake of public comfort. We hear his words echoing across decades into this moment in Alaska.

The detention of minor children, especially in a state without appropriate facilities for their care, raises grave humanitarian and legal concerns.

What does it say about us if masked agents seize a mother from her car while she is still in her pajamas?

What does it say about us if a five-year-old cries for his mother and is taken into custody?

What does it say about our professed commitment to family values when families are fractured in this way?

We affirm that nations have laws and that those laws must be administered. Yet law enforcement divorced from compassion becomes something less than justice. Scripture commands us, in both the Hebrew prophets and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to welcome the stranger, to defend the vulnerable, and to protect children. These are not partisan commitments; they are moral ones.

Dr. King warned of the "appalling silence of the good." We will not be silent.

We call upon federal authorities to:

- Ensure the safety, humane treatment, and appropriate housing of detainees.
- Provide full transparency regarding the grounds and conditions of detention.
- Exercise prosecutorial discretion consistent with stated priorities that target serious criminal conduct, not families seeking asylum.
- Work toward alternatives to detention that preserve family unity while due process proceeds.

We call upon Alaska's elected leaders, local, state, and federal, to advocate for the wellbeing of families and children and for immigration enforcement practices that reflect both justice and mercy.

And we call upon our congregations to pray, to advocate peacefully, and to accompany those who are afraid.

There is a moral crisis when children are placed behind locked doors without clear necessity and without facilities designed for their care. There is a moral crisis when fear eclipses compassion. There is a moral crisis when we grow accustomed to scenes that should trouble our conscience.

The Church must be neither the chaplain of the status quo nor the echo of political talking points. We are called to be witnesses to the dignity of every human being, created in the image of God.

Alaska is vast, beautiful, and often harsh, and we know the importance of shelter. We know what it means to look out for one another, despite differences, in dangerous conditions. Let us not lose that instinct.

We pray for Sonia Espinoza Arriaga and her children. We pray for Alexander Sanchez-Ramos. We pray for those charged with enforcing the law. And we pray that justice, rooted in truth, tempered with mercy, and guided by the protection of the most vulnerable will prevail.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Kristi McGuire, Conference Superintendent, *Alaska Conference of the UMC*

The Rev. Tim Oslovich, Bishop, *Alaska Synod (ELCA)*

The Rev. Elizabeth Schultz, Executive Presbyter, *The Presbytery of Yukon (PCUSA)*

The Rt. Rev. Mark Lattime, Bishop, *Episcopal Diocese of Alaska*