

**General Convention**  
**Visit to the T. Don Hutto Detention Center**  
**Taylor Texas**  
**July 8, 2018**



It turns out that griping can bring about goodness, and conversations started in sacristies with Bishops really can make a difference. Such was the case back in June, when The Rev. Megan Castellan - my seminary classmate, and the new rector at Saint John's Episcopal Church in Ithaca, NY, where I grew up - and Bishop Dede Duncan Probe of the Diocese of Central NY were grumbling about all the horrible news in the world, and found themselves saying, "Why doesn't the Church DO something?! Why don't we just show up and pray or something?!!" ~And within a few days, Megan had moved mountains and organized a field trip for General Convention to the T. Don Hutto Detention Center in Taylor, Texas, about 40 minutes outside of Austin.

So on Sunday morning, July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1200 Episcopalians boarded 19 buses plus one ADA accessible bus, and another 200 or more got into their cars, and made their way out to the Detention Center. My bus was pretty chatty all the way there, and one of the young priests on the bus led us in some singing. Once we turned onto the road to the Center, though, and saw the security fences and the stark building with long, narrow windows, a hush fell over the bus and we began to feel the gravity of place and time.

Just behind those walls were women, themselves beautiful and beloved children of God, who had been separated from their families and **their**

children, living in a state of not knowing, and of fear. Surely, we were entering holy ground -- entering into holy time.

Our bus rounded the last corner, and joined the line of other buses. We were directed to a field next to a baseball diamond and, as we gathered, some began singing softly again:

“Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary: pure and holy, tried and true.”

Old friends and new gathered under the Big Sky and the hot Texas sun, singing and waiting for directions. The service itself included prayer and witness, lots of singing, and a dynamic sermon powerfully delivered by our Presiding Bishop as only he can do. You can watch it online, and I highly commend it to you if you haven't seen it already.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj9MPQTQDCI>

He set the stage by saying, “...we do not come in hatred. We do not come in bigotry. We do not come to put anybody down. We come to lift everybody up. We come in love. We come in love because we follow Jesus. And Jesus taught us love.”

He went on to say that, “We come because we believe that this nation, conceived in liberty, dedicated to the proposition that all people are created equal, we believe that we must call this nation, America, back to its very soul. We are here because we love this nation. Because if you really love somebody you don't leave 'em the way they are, you help them to become their best selves. We are here,” our Presiding Bishop said, “to save the soul of America.”

During the service some, including our own Bishop, broke away and walked back up the road toward the gates to get a closer look at the Center. They were followed by police cars with lights flashing. They eventually turned back, and everything remained peaceful.

At the end of the service, the entire group turned around and faced the cold looking building and began waving and singing. Those with a closer

view said the detainees were waving white pieces of paper or towels in the windows so they could be seen. If you look closely at this picture, you can see some of those little white flags.

Later in the day, someone shared a Tweet from a group called Grassroots Leadership, who had helped Mother Megan and others make connections and secure permits. The Tweet said:

A woman called from Hutto after today's prayer and told us they were glued to the windows until the last bus left the detention center. Women inside were crying, saying they knew they weren't alone after seeing so many people there. Thank you [Episcopal Church]!"

It was an amazing event that even Mother Megan says still feels a bit overwhelming. Thanks be to God for those moments when griping turns to goodness!

~The Very Rev. Ann M. Tillman  
Deputy, Episcopal Diocese of Western New York  
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### NOTES

Refugee Ministry in the Diocese of Western New York

Archdeacon, The Venerable Tom Tripp

Deacon Joanne Coury Frake

Deacon Diana Leiker

Working with Journey's End and Viveé through a Diocesan Grant  
assisting immigrant families

Number coming into Buffalo decreased over the last year  
Still working to support those who come

Saint Peter's Eggertsville & Calvary Williamsville -  
most active parishes

Ecumenical effort including Lutherans and Roman Catholics

**Collect for Refugees from Episcopal Migration Ministries:**

Holy One of Bethlehem,  
From your earliest days you know the threat of death,  
the terror of flight, and the pain of exile.  
Today we know that so many -- millions upon millions --  
flee from their own lives and for their children.  
The numbers seem so vast, the problem so great.  
It is easy to feel helpless. It is easy to forget. It is easy to ignore.  
Shake us from complacency and from resignation.  
Fill our hearts and minds with understanding and compassion for your  
children who are forced by persecution to flee their homes.  
Remind us that each number is a name, each statistic a person --  
your child, your beloved.  
Strengthen our resolve; stir in us a spirit of agency and action.  
For you have blessed each of us with gifts to be shared in love  
for all you have created,  
gifts that may be used to welcome, to comfort, to befriend.  
Grant that we would listen for your call.  
In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

From #Pray4RefuggesWeekofPrayer