

September 16th, 2026

To our neighbors across East Tennessee,

Heartfelt greetings! We are clergy and faith leaders from many traditions across this region. We write together because our traditions, however distinct in practice and belief, rest on a shared moral foundation that to love God and to love our neighbor are not two commandments but one, and that a community which neglects the second has not, in truth, kept the first.

It is from that foundation that we speak to the serious situation that has developed in our region.

This year the Tennessee General Assembly, in open coordination with the White House, passed a slate of new immigration laws for our state, even though immigration law is strictly federal jurisdiction. What advocates warned against through the winter is now the law of the land, however unjust. It is now a crime under state law to remain in Tennessee after a final order of immigration removal. Local governments must verify the immigration status of anyone seeking most public assistance, and their employees face penalties if they do not. Our police are being conscripted into federal ICE enforcement whether or not their communities consent. For two sessions running, members of the General Assembly have tried to make our public schools track and report the immigration status of their own students; an effort that has not yet become law, but it will likely be introduced again.

These laws answer no genuine crisis of public safety. They deliberately construct a climate of fear whose logic is not the protection of this community but the racial targeting of a particular population of people within it, discrimination now given the force of law. The harm does not fall only on those without documentation. It falls on US citizen children in mixed-status families, on patients who will now avoid seeking medical care, on victims of crime who will not call for help, on families who go without food because they are too afraid to go grocery shopping, all because institutions our own taxes pay for have been turned into instruments of federal surveillance. When fear becomes the organizing principle of public life, every last one of us bears its cost.

These are not just issues to be decided in Nashville; they are local decisions too. Knox County has become a regional hub for immigration detention. Since Jan. 1, 2025, over 5,000 community members have been held in detention on immigration matters, a *civil* offense, at the Roger D. Wilson Detention Facility on Maloneyville Road; brought in from across East and Middle Tennessee through an expanding web of ICE enforcement agreements. And there are plans being made to expand these operations here. Solicitations believed to represent ICE are circulating across a multi-county region around Knoxville, seeking to expand operations and to hire dozens of new ICE agents, positioning our region as a center of ICE enforcement for years ahead. *None of this has been set before us for meaningful public deliberation.*

We are not strangers to this work. For years we have stood with our immigrant neighbors in vigil, in advocacy, and in accompaniment; we have sat with families in our own congregations who live in fear; we have watched as the government has intentionally blurred, confused, and distorted the line between “authorized” and “unauthorized” immigration status, so that status can be revoked, pathways to legal status vanish, and even lawful permanent residence no longer is a guarantee of safety from ICE. We know of minor US citizens who have been deported from this country along with their parents. This threatens all

of us, because a community that will deny one neighbor due process has already decided that it's not a given right for any of us.

So we want to speak plainly to those in our community who are afraid:

We see you. You are our neighbors and our co-workers, the parents at our children's schools, the families who worship alongside us, the faces in our clinics and our shops. You are not alone, and you are not forgotten. We cannot promise you that this season will get better before it gets worse; but we can promise you that we will not keep silent while it lasts, and that you will not face it by yourselves.

We affirm that nations have the right to regulate their borders, and to do so justly. But just regulation has recognizable markers. It grants due process. It treats each person as a human being and not a category. It does not enlist hospitals, schools, or police against the communities they exist to serve. The laws recently enacted in our state fail in all of these regards. Out of the conviction to uphold the God-given dignity of every person who lives among us, we are compelled to call for the following:

- We call on those who hold power in this region, specifically the Knox County government and sheriff department, to terminate the Knox County jail detention bed contract with ICE. This contract can be ended, and we call for it to be ended. We reject spending our local money and resources on increasing suffering in our community. In addition, we ask our local elected leaders to refuse every expansion of ICE enforcement operations in our region. These programs do not make our communities safer or more secure, but actually increase suspicion and mistrust of law enforcement.
- To all police officers of our communities, most of you who took up this work to protect your neighbors and not to hunt for them, we make an appeal rather than a demand: The law can compel your department, but it cannot compel your conscience. We urge you to exercise every discretion the law still leaves you, decline the errands that reach beyond what it strictly requires, and treat the frightened people in front of you as the neighbors they are. Where the choice remains yours, choose mercy.
- To all current and former elected officials of both political parties, we appeal to you to speak publicly and privately to the current leadership in the State Legislature to cease and desist from spreading malicious falsehoods about immigrants in our state and nation and enacting anti-immigrant legislation that harms all Tennessee residents, and strangles small businesses, farmers, and repels new businesses.
- We call on our neighbors who hold property and standing, landlords and developers, business owners and institutions, to refuse to house ICE offices and facilities. Your consent is yours to withhold. And the public deserves a voice in the expansion of ICE operations in our community.

- And we call for an end to the deportation of our neighbors on the sole basis of where they were born, particularly those who came here legally. A person's country of origin is not a crime, and we will not abide its being treated as one.

We will continue to show up, to speak, and to accompany our neighbors through whatever the coming months and years require, and we invite every person of conscience in this region to stand with us.

The measure of any community is found in how it treats its most vulnerable. We intend to be measured accordingly.

Multi-Faith Leaders of East Tennessee

multifaithetn@gmail.com

Individual signatories below.

Signatories to the Open Letter from Multifaith Leaders of East TN, as of Tuesday, September 15, 2026

Organizations listed for identification purposes only.

1.	Rev.	Joseph	Akkara	Associate Pastor	Carmelites of Mary Immaculate
2.	Rev.	Renzo	Alvarado	Vicar	
3.	Ustadha	Zaynab	Ansari	Faculty & board member	Tayseer Seminary
4.	Deacon	Hicks	Armor		Diocese of Knoxville
5.	Ms.	Vicki	Arpino		The Restoration House of East Tennessee
6.	Rev. Dr.	Brian	Austin	Priest	Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee
7.	Rev.	Jim	Bailes	retired clergy	United Methodist Church
8.	Rev.	Tonya	Barnette	Associate Pastor	Church of the Savior, United Church of Christ
9.	Pastor	Chris	Battle	Pastor	Fern Street Baptist Church
10.	Most Reverend	Mark	Beckman	Bishop of Knoxville	Catholic Diocese of Knoxville
11.	Ms.	Lorrie	Beevers	Clerk	West Knoxville Friends Meeting (Quaker)
12.	Reverend	Brenda	Bell-McAdams	Pastor	Holston United Methodist Conference
13.	Deacon	Jim	Bello	Deacon	Holy Spirit Catholic Church
14.	Rev.	Doug	Bitzer		Immaculate Conception
15.	Ms.	Jo Lynn	Blomquist	Church Council Chair	Trinity United Methodist Church, Lenoir City
16.	Rev.	Carol	Bodeau	Minister	Unitarian Universalist
17.	Rev.	Laura	Bogle	Community Minister	Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
18.	Deacon	Thomas	Bomkamp		St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church in
19.	Dr.	William	Booth	Senior Pastor	First Baptist Church Maryville
20.	Deacon	Gary	Brinkworth		St. Stephen's Catholic Church

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21.	The Rev.	Claire	Brown		Episcopal
22.	Rev.	Ann Owens	Brunger	Pastor	Presbyterian Church USA
23.	Rev.	Chris	Buice	Minister	Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
24.	Rev.	Leah	Burns		United Methodist Church, Holston Conference
25.	Rev.	Charles	Burton	Pastor	Catholic
26.	Rev. Dr.	Bob	Cantrell	retired clergy	United Methodist Church
27.	Rev.	Brenda	Carroll		United Methodist Church
28.	Rev. Dr.	Richard	Carter	Priest	Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd
29.	Rev.	Daniel	Castillo	Pastor	United Methodist Church
30.	Rev.	Tom	Charters	Pastor	St. Michael the Archangel Parish
31.	Rev.	Barbara	Clark	Pastor	Trinity United Methodist Church-Lenoir City
32.	Rev. Dr.	Richard	Coble	Pastor/Head of Staff	Westminster Presbyterian Church Knoxville
33.	Rev. Mark Colbert	Mark	Colbert	Associate Priest	Episcopal Church
34.	The Right Reverend	Brian	Cole	Bishop	Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee
35.	Deacon	Humberto	Collazo Lopez	Deacon	St Dominic Catholic Church, Kingsport
36.	Fr.	Dustin	Collins	Pastor	St. Mary Parish
37.	Pastor	Molly	Conaway	Lead Pastor	Crossings
38.	Ms.	Jo Alison	Cortez	Missions/Outreach Chair	Trinity United Methodist Church-Lenoir City
39.	Ms	Deborah	Counce	Trustees chair	Trinity United Methodist Church, Lenoir City
40.	Fr.	Mike	Creson	Hospital Chaplain	

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41.	Rev.	Brynne	Crowe	Pastor	Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
42.	Rev.	Michael	Cummins	Pastor	Cathedral of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus
43.	Rev. Dr.	Joel	Daniels	Pastor	Church of the Savior, United Church of Christ
44.	Rev.	Colleen	Darraugh	Lead Pastor	Metropolitan Community Church of Knoxville
45.	Rev.	Jean	Davidson	Retired clergy	Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
46.	Deacon	Bob	Denne		Holy Family Catholic Parish Seymour TN
47.	Rev.	Bodhi Kahlil	DerParunakian	Associate Pastor	Metropolitan Community Church Knoxville TN
48.	Pastor	Charley	Dever	Pastor	Commonwealth Knoxville
49.	Mr.	Mark	Dmochowski	President	Soc. of St. Vincent de Paul - OLPH Conference
50.	Rev.	Charlie	Donahue	Pastor	Immaculate Conception Church
51.	Rev.	Matthew	Donahue	Associate Pastor	Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church
52.	Rev.	John	Dowling	Pastor	St. Augustine Catholic
53.	Deacon	David	Duhamel	Executive Director	Catholic Charities of East Tennessee, Inc.
54.	Deacon	Mike	Duncan		Saint Albert the Great Catholic Church
55.	Rev.	Elaine	Eberhart		United Methodist Church
56.	Deacon	David	Egan	Deacon	Diocese of Knoxville
57.	Deacon	Tim	Elliott		All Saints Catholic Parish
58.	Deacon	John	Elshaw		
59.	Dr.	Kenneth	Faught	Retired clergy	
60.	Rabbi	Alon	Ferency		
61.	Rev. Dr.	Amy	Figg Ley	Pastor	St. John's Lutheran Church (ELCA)

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62.	Mr.	Keys	Fillauer	Chairman of Church Council	First United Methodist Church Oak Ridge
63.	Rev.	Christopher	Floersh	Pastor	St. Albert the Great
64.	Rev.	Mark	Flynn	Pastor	United Methodist Church
65.	Rev.	Davy	Fosburgh	Designated Conference Minister	Southeast Conference United Church of Christ
66.	Rev.	Lee	Fox	Baptist Minister	Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
67.	Rev.	Marcia	Free	retired clergy	Church of the Savior, United Church of Christ
68.	Deacon	William	Frere		St. Joseph Parish
69.	Rev. Dr.	Gordon	Gibson	retired clergy	Unitarian Universalist
70.	Rev.	John	Gill	retired clergy	United Church of Christ
71.	Rev. Dr.	Caleb	Gilmore	Teaching Pastor	Crossings
72.	Ms.	Susan	Harbin	Ordained Elder	Farragut Presbyterian Church
73.	Deacon	James	Haselsteiner		St Mary's Johnson City
74.	Rev.	Jonathan	Haskell	Executive Director	Ujima Soccer Academy
75.	Ms.	Carmen	Hicks		Lennon-Seney United Methodist Church
76.	Rev.	Kyle	Hodge	Pastor	Ball Camp Baptist Church
77.	Deacon	Roger	Huber		
78.	Rev.	Peter	Iorio	Vicar General/Pastor	Catholic Diocese of Knoxville/Our Lady of Fatima Catholic Church
79.	Rev.	Ginny	Ireland	Grief Coach	Norris Religious Fellowship
80.	Rev. Dr.	William	Ireland	Pastor	Norris Religious Fellowship
81.	Rev.	Barbara	Jackson	Associate Pastor	St. Paul AME Church
82.	Deacon	William	Jacobs		

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83.	Pastor	Eric	Johnson	Pastor	Vestal United Methodist Church
84.	Rev. Dr.	Don	Jones	Elder	United Methodist Church
85.	Deacon	Jim	Lawson		St John Neumann
86.	Rev.	Joe	Ley	Deacon for Leadership Development & Community Engagement	Peace Lutheran Church & St. John's Lutheran Church
87.	Rev.	Amber	Lloyd	Associate Minister	Church Street United Methodist Church
88.	Rev. Dr.	Meredith	Loftis	Associate Pastor	First Presbyterian Church, Knoxville
89.	Rev.	Eugene	Lovell	retired clergy	First United Methodist Church, Maryville
90.	Ms.	Catherine	Loya	Director of Religious Education	Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
91.	Mrs	Marisa	Lykins	Non profit staff representative	The Restoration House of East Tennessee
92.	Dr.	Joe B	Maddox	Pastor	Payne Avenue MBC
93.	Rev.	Glenna	Manning	retired clergy	United Methodist Church
94.	Ms.	Beth	Martin	Elder	Farragut Presbyterian Church
95.	Fr.	Bill	McNeeley	Pastor	Holy Family Church
96.	Rev.	Dave	McNeely	Pastor	Ekklesia Church
97.	Ms.	Mary Beth	Meadows		Christian Community Development Association Knoxville Local Network
98.	Deacon	Dennis	Meinert		
99.	Rev.	Linda	Miner		United Church of Christ
100.	Mr.	Mark	Mohundro	Executive Director	Tennessee Unitarian Universalist Community Action Network
101.	Rev.	Jake	Morrill	Minister	Foothills Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Maryville
102.	Mr.	Charles	Mulligan	Coordinator	Weekly Witness

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103.	Mrs.	Geri	Mulligan	Coordinator	Knox County Catholic Jail Ministry
104.	Deacon	Patrick	Murphy-Racey		St. John XXIII Catholic Church
105.	Rev.	Ann	Myers	Pastor	Lancing Presbyterian Church
106.	Rev.	Catherine	Nance	retired clergy	United Methodist Church
107.	Rev. Dr.	Wendy	Neff	Pastor	Presbytery of East Tennessee
108.	Deacon	Paul	Nelson		
109.	Rev.	Michael F.	Nolan	Pastor	St. Therese of Lisieux Cleveland Tennessee
110.	Rev.	Bailey	Norman		Episcopal
111.	Rev.	Robert	O'Donnell, CSP		St. John XXIII University Parish
112.	Rev.	Lyn	Oakley	Pastor	Washington Presbyterian Church
113.	Rev.	Carl	Oaks	Retired Pastor	United Methodist Church
114.	Rev.	Thomas	O'Connell		
115.	Rev.	Val	Ohle	Pastor	United Methodist Church
116.	Pastor	Rebecca	O'Malley	Children and Families Pastor	Crossings
117.	Diácono	Agustin	Ortega	Deacon	
118.	Rev.	Doug	Owens	Pastor	All Saints Catholic Church
119.	Rev.	Gradye	Parsons	Parish associate	Westminster Presbyterian Church
120.	Rev.	Rachel	Penmore	Campus Minister/Executive Director	UKirk at the University of Tennessee
121.	Mrs.	Anna	Platillero Garlington	Community Liaison	Knoxville Internationals Network
122.	The Rev.	RJ	Powell	Priest-in-Charge	St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Maryville
123.	Rev.	R Don	Prange	Director	Ministries in Economic Justice, United Church of Christ

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124.	Mrs.	Blanca	Primm	Director of Hispanic Ministry	Roman Catholic Diocese of Knoxville
125.	Deacon	Steve	Ratterman		St. Therese Catholic Church, Cleveland, TN
126.	Deacon	Jack	Raymond		Holy Family
127.	Rev.	Tim	Reynolds	Pastor	2nd Presbyterian Church, Knoxville
128.	Rev.	Lawrence	Rice	Pastor	St. John XXIII University Parish
129.	Rev. Dr.	Scott	Rollins	Pastor	Highland Presbyterian Church and Eusebia Presbyterian Church
130.	Ms.	Judith	Rosenberg	President	Knoxville Jewish Alliance
131.	Rev.	Adam	Royal	Pastor	St. Alphonsus Catholic Church
132.	Dr.	Herb	Sadler	retired clergy	United Methodist Church
133.	Rev.	Clair	Sauer	Co-Lead Pastor	First United Methodist Church of Oak Ridge
134.	Ms.	Joanie	Scheuer	Elder	Farragut Presbyterian Church
135.	Deacon	Jim	Schmall		
136.	Rev.	Jim	Sessions	retired clergy	United Methodist Church
137.	Dr.	Khalid	Shahu	Imam	Muslim Community of Knoxville (MCK)
138.	Rev. Dr.	Katina	Sharp	Pastor	Powell Presbyterian Church
139.	Deacon	Chad	Shields		Christ The King Catholic Church
140.	Rev. Dr.	Walter	Shurden	Retired clergy	Baptist
141.	Rabbi	Raina	Siroty	Senior Rabbi	Temple Beth El
142.	Dr.	Gregory	Smith	Co-Chair, Social Concerns Committee	First United Methodist Church of Oak Ridge
143.	Rev. Dr.	Greta	Smith		United Methodist Church
144.	Rev.	Doug	Smith	retired clergy	United Methodist Church

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145.	Rev.	Lóre	Stevens	Minister	Unitarian Universalist
146.	The Rt. Rev. Dr.	Kevin	Strickland	Bishop	Southeastern Synod, ELCA
147.	Rev.	Adam	Tarver		Baptist
148.	Rev.	Wayne	Thomas	retired clergy	Church of the Savior UCC
149.	Rev.	John	Tirro	Pastor of Worship	St John's Lutheran Church, Knoxville
150.	Rev.	Arthur	Torres Barona	Pastor	
151.	The Rev.	Bo	Townsend	retired clergy	Episcopal
152.	Rev.	Nghia	Tran	Chaplain	St Andrew Dung Lac public association
153.	Rev. Dr.	Major	Treadway	Pastor	First Baptist Church of Jefferson City
154.	Ms.	Boo	Tyson	Moderator	Church of the Savior UCC
155.	Rev.	Miguel	Velez	Pastor	Diocese of Knoxville
156.	Ms.	Luz S.	Velez Perez	Council Leader	St Dominic Catholic Church
157.	Ms.	Kelly	Waggoner	Youth ministry	
158.	Mr.	Austin	Wall	Church Trustee, ELL Ministry Leader	Fountain City United Methodist Church
159.	Mrs.	Britney	Wall	Connections Liaison	Fountain City United Methodist Church
160.	Ms.	Jani	Whaley	Executive Director	Knoxville Internationals Network-KIN
161.	Rev.	John Mark	Wiggers	Rector	St. James Episcopal Church
162.	Rev.	Michael	Willey		Diocese of Knoxville
163.	Rev.	Chad	Wright-Pittman	Pastor	Lake Forest Presbyterian Church
164.	Rev. Dr.	Stephen	Yates	Minister	Lake Hills Presbyterian, PC(USA)