

Chipping away at immigrants' dignity

We proudly resist ICE's actions to stay true to biblical and American traditions

BY ANITA HALASZ
AND RICHARD KOUBEK

Since President Donald Trump's inauguration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrests of immigrants without legal status are up more than 50 percent on Long Island. Nationally, the number of those immigrants with no criminal record arrested by ICE has tripled. Their crime: having fled extreme violence and poverty in their homelands to seek asylum or find work in America.

Given the threats of ICE arrest, Long Island Jobs with Justice has trained almost 500 volunteers to support immigrants by accompanying them to their court appearances, creating neighborhood rapid response networks to stand with them when ICE is present and establishing three sanctuary congregations that offer physical shelter to immigrants facing ICE arrest.

About 80 percent of our volunteers are people of faith, most from the Judeo-Christian tradition. One of our board members

warned us that mixing religion and politics can be a problem when people on the political right and left read the same Bible but come up with diametrically opposed interpretations.

He makes a point: White evangelical Christians, who take the Bible literally, overwhelmingly voted for Trump and remain among his most steadfast supporters despite his personal behaviors, rhetoric and policies that are very unchristian.

We turned to a secular historian for some context on how the Bible has shaped political history. Thomas Cahill has written six books on key factors that changed human history. One is "The Gifts of the Jews," in which he demonstrates how the Jewish belief that humans are made in God's image and therefore deserve to be treated with dignity led Jews to demand justice for the weakest people living at the margins of their society: the widows, the orphans, the strangers.

Cahill followed this with "Desire of the Everlasting Hills," about the unique historical con-



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ICE arrests are up by 50 percent on Long Island since President Donald Trump's inauguration. Above, an arrest in Brentwood.

tributions of Jesus of Nazareth, showing how he called his followers to bring the weak and vulnerable from the margins of society to the centers of power, as in the Gospel of Matthew, where he challenges us to welcome strangers as he would welcome them.

Now compare these biblical ideas with the religious rhetoric we have heard, such as justifying the separation of immigrant children from their parents because the Bible requires us to obey the law. Or how

about using the Bible to condemn gays when there are only four references to homosexuality in the Bible, compared with 300 references to justice for the poor and vulnerable? This biblical preference for the vulnerable was epitomized by the Hebrew prophet Isaiah: "Woe to you who make unjust laws . . ."

Our volunteers — both people of faith and no faith — draw from these core biblical values that demand respect for all people, values that have shaped the American creed

and this nation's historic openness to immigrants.

Recently, Lawrence Provenzano, the Episcopal bishop of Long Island, decried the political dialogue that "has been chipping away at the dignity of the people of God by misrepresenting, by misusing our understanding of Jesus and Holy Scripture . . . for political gain." As an example, he criticized the negative public conversation about immigrants that "degrades the image of Christ and does not find a place in Scripture where we are called over and over to welcome the stranger."

We are proud of our volunteers who resist federal policies that distort the biblical and American traditions while serving their neighbors who live in fear of unjust deportations.



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coordinator of Long Island Jobs with Justice, an advocacy organization based in Hauppauge.



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New York legalized medical marijuana in 2014. Now the state is mulling legal personal use. Above, a cannabis farm in Johnstown, N.Y.

value. But saying that legalizing the recreational use of marijuana is the way to go, in my opinion, really misses the mark. We can achieve realistic goals on marijuana, but that doesn't mean we throw good judgment out the window. We cannot afford to promulgate the message of legalization

when there is so much to lose.

Howard Riesel,
Coram

Editor's note: The writer, a clinical social worker and Molloy College instructor in addiction studies, has worked with substance abusers at Glen Cove Hospital for more than 30 years, and in private practice.

LIRR commuters need not be adversarial

As a regular Long Island Rail Road commuter, I want to make clear that the riders Newsday interviewed in the Aug. 13 news story "MTA board: Eng can fix LIRR" do not speak for me.

Everyone gets frustrated when there are delays and suspensions of service, but there are more constructive ways to advocate for improved service. These include submitting formal complaints or suggestions to the LIRR, attending public meetings, lobbying one's state politicians, volunteering on the LIRR Commuter Council and writing letters like this one.

The commuters you featured seemed content to punch at straw men on social media and portray the relationship between themselves and the LIRR as adversarial, rather than cooperative.

It was especially unfair to blame LIRR President Phillip

Eng and other LIRR employees for issues that were beyond their control, such as the Aug. 6 pedestrian fatalities being investigated as suicides.

Some LIRR customers think that taking out their anger and frustration on LIRR leadership and staff is the same as advocating for themselves and fellow riders. They are incorrect in this belief.

Matthew Zeidman,
New Hyde Park

Stop gotcha-type tickets at red lights

In the Aug. 9 news story "Lawmaker targets red-light tickets," I was surprised to read that Nassau County is still ticketing for on- or over-the-stop-line stops. If the county wants to convince motorists that the red-light cameras are not just a money grab, they should stop these gotcha-type of tickets.

When the issue was raised a few years ago, I studied the

stop lines on the roads and realized some are several feet before their intersections. So, when you stop on or over the line, you still aren't in traffic.

The county treats the driver who realizes the light turned red and stops — albeit over the line, avoiding entering the intersection and having an accident — the same as the driver who sees the light turn red and dangerously blows through the intersection. If you're paying the fine regardless, where's the incentive to obey the law even though the video shows you stopped on the line?

Stop splitting hairs and going after drivers merely to fatten the county's coffers.

Barbara Haynes,
Hauppauge

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