

## Immigration Prayer Requests - March 2026

Here at City Church, we understand that prayer undergirds effective Christian public witness. Prayer is not an empty gesture that relieves us of our responsibility to act; it is the soil which nurtures and informs loving and sustainable action on behalf of our neighbors. It is with this posture that we, and other churches throughout San Francisco, pray over current needs in the immigration court system.

In the following pages, you'll find prayer requests from community members who are highly attuned to current needs in the immigration court system. We invite you to pray over this list throughout the month.

### Immigration Prayer Litany

**Leader:** God, our Sustainer, we pray for communities in our nation who are living under threat of violence and harassment from enforcement agents.

**All: We pray for the protection and well-being of the people of Minnesota, and of our immigrant neighbors here in the Bay Area and throughout this nation.**

**Leader:** God, our protector, we pray for those who are sheltering in place for fear of leaving their homes, that you will care for them in spirit and in body. We pray for those who are participating in mutual aid and community watches, that you would encourage and equip them.

**All: We pray for those who have been detained or deported, that they will have access to legal representation, medical care, and communication with loved ones.**

**Leader:** God of justice, we pray for immigrants with court cases to have access to competent and diligent attorneys. We pray for legal aid organizations to have resources and wisdom to provide counsel amidst rapidly changing policies.

**All: We pray for employees of the immigration court system as they handle large caseloads with decreased resources. We pray for the immigrants whose cases have been delayed due to immigration judges being fired.**

**Leader:** God of righteousness, we pray for the hearts of decision-makers at all levels, that they will seek to follow Your command to love and welcome the immigrant. We pray for the hearts of federal agents, that they will resist cruel practices and instead do what is right in Your eyes.

**All: We pray for ourselves, that we will be filled with courage and wisdom to take faithful action on behalf of our most vulnerable neighbors. May we actively participate in building a world that reflects Your love and welcome to all.**

## General Prayer Requests:

1. **For hope** — to replace fear for immigrants of all types, but especially those without documentation and most at risk for deportation without due process
2. **For resources** — for the family members left behind as their loved ones are being detained and deported, often without communication to unknown places
3. **For human rights**<sup>1</sup> — for immigrants seeking asylum at the border who have the international human right to pursue their claim inside the U.S., that they can be heard at credible fear or reasonable fear interviews to make their claim as well as at immigration court
4. **For willingness to learn the truth** — that the populace learn from accurate news sources that immigration is a complex area of law with issues that cannot be resolved in news sound bites, but requires many things to address the reasons why people flee their homelands and seek asylum in the U.S.

## For cases in immigration court:

1. For immigrants to be **bold** in showing up for their court cases (otherwise they risk the judge ordering them to be deported in their absence that allows ICE agents to seek them out)
2. For immigrants being **wrongfully detained** and sent to countries not their own where new dangers and problems arise for them
3. For immigrants to be **treated with dignity and respect** in the immigration courts as they pursue their cases especially when the Immigration Judges have no control over what ICE agents do to them outside their courtrooms
4. For immigrants with court cases to find **competent and diligent attorneys** to represent them
5. For immigrants with **competency issues**<sup>2</sup> who have appointed attorneys being defunded by the Trump administration
6. For immigration attorneys (representing immigrants) who **are more overworked** than ever before due to the high demand for their legal services
7. For immigration attorneys (representing immigrants) **to be ethical** (e.g., in not taking financial advantage of clients/ potential clients due to the high need for representation as well as complications in cases caused by the current administration that create more work and re-doing work.)
8. For **ongoing uncertainty within the federal workforce**, especially due to ongoing firings and limited budget (Congress only funded now through the end of January 2026) which may cause additional “furloughs” (work without pay at immigration courts)
9. For Immigration Judges (“IJs”) who **feel demoralized and are very overworked** in a hostile work environment
10. For **wisdom** for Immigration Judges who are making decisions in highly pressured environment with changing conditions on almost a daily basis
11. For **Immigration Judges (IJs) who are being fired without cause**, especially in San

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. has implemented a person's right to seek asylum within its borders from the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 which codified international law from the UN Convention on Refugees. A refugee is someone who is outside their country of nationality (or inside the U.S., an asylum-seeker) who is fleeing their country due to persecution (threat to life or freedom) on a protected ground, specifically race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group (this is a legal construct) because their government will not or cannot protect them.

<sup>2</sup> Mostly specific to someone with mental health issues that impact a noncitizen's ability to testify in court. There is a special category for certain cases in which they are appointed an attorney, but it is very limited. There is another category in which an attorney will say that their client has special needs which may include mental deficiencies. The attorney will ask the judge to conduct a special inquiry to determine whether their client is able to testify based on their ability to understand where they are, the purpose of their hearing, etc. The judge can then decide whether this person requires accommodations (called safeguards) such as limited questioning, allowing the attorney to ask questions in a different way, take extra breaks during testimony, and whatever is appropriate to the circumstances.

- Francisco where the case grant rate is the highest in the nation
12. For the **additional dockets** that are being transferred from fired Immigration Judges and cases (ie, people's lives) being needlessly delayed by this process
  13. For all the employees working at the immigration courts who being forced to work **with less and less resources** as the workload expands

**Those defining and pushing policy:**

1. For the Trump administration and everyone who supports the executive order, "Guaranteeing the States Protection from Invasion," which prevents anyone at our southern border for petitioning for asylum, whether or not at a port of entry, in contravention with federal law and the dictates of Christian conscience. Help Christians everywhere remember that the holy family were themselves asylees and see how this order violates God's mandates for government. We pray that our leaders who enacted this policy would repent and seek your ways.
2. For the administration's management to stop creating operating policies within the immigration courts that are causing chaos and negatively affect the Immigration Judges (Immigration Judges (IJs)), the staff, and parties in the courtroom (eg, limiting in-person interpreters, needlessly shifting dockets, etc)
3. For decision-makers at all levels impacting immigration especially policymakers in Congress who can change the laws and federal judges (in the judicial branch) who are the only backstop to Trump's administration through litigation
4. For Appellate Immigration Judges who are changing caselaw to prevent Immigration Judges from granting meritorious cases related to violence against women or other gender-based asylum cases
5. For God to hold back/stay the hand of evil in all aspects as Trump continues to force inhumane, unjust and illegal practices throughout the US

**Those in the Department of Homeland Security:**

1. For ICE agents who are arresting and deporting immigrants to be humane in their treatment of them despite their directives from managers
2. For DHS attorneys to make fewer needless oppositions, which slow down and prevent resolution to immigrants' cases

**From Jubilee Immigration Advocates:**

- Celebration: We hired a new Spanish-speaking attorney, Daniel, who will start January 5th! We are excited to welcome Daniel to our team.
- Gratitude: For a couple of grants Jubilee received in December and the generous contributions of Jubilee's community of supporters.
- Discernment: The current immigration landscape, with its rapidly-changing draconian policies, requires that we engage in very extensive risk assessments with clients to determine if they should submit certain immigration applications that they may be eligible for. The risk assessment can feel overwhelming, for our team and our clients. For many who are living in the shadows, submitting an application means making themselves known to the government and risking arrest at their immigration interview (a recent trend, on top of the ongoing immigration courthouse arrests). There is a risk to doing something (submitting an application), but also to not do something (remaining undocumented).

## Definitions & Education

### **Refugee/asylum-seeker**

A refugee (or inside the U.S., an asylum-seeker) is someone who is fleeing their country of nationality due to persecution (threat to life or freedom) on a protected ground, specifically race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group (this is a legal construct) because their government will not or cannot protect them.

### **Respondent**

Noncitizen/intending immigrant who is defending their case in immigration court from being removed (deported) from the U.S. This would be a role similar to a defendant in a criminal case because DHS is leveling charges against the respondent and they are defending their claim to a legal right to remain in the U.S.

Immigration violations are federal civil law, not criminal law. Immigration courts are administrative courts because they sit inside the U.S. Department of Justice which is an agency under the Executive branch of the federal government.

### **In Absentia Removal Order**

When a Respondent does not show up to their hearing in immigration court and they received proper notice, an Immigration Judge is basically required under the law to issue a removal order (known more commonly as a deportation order). The Respondent can ask the Court to reopen their case for good cause, including that they did not receive proper notification of their hearing or that they had an emergency, such as needing to go to the hospital, got in a car accident on the way to court, etc. These orders are in effect even if the Respondent doesn't know about them, which enables DHS/ICE (U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security Immigration & Customs Enforcement) to execute the order at any time. The only way a Respondent has a chance to have their case heard is to attend their hearing. However, it is also becoming riskier as new strategies are being utilized by DHS/ICE in making it much more difficult for a Respondent to have their case heard and also because people are being arrested by ICE in ways that never happened before.

### **Right to an Attorney: Civil vs Criminal Law**

Because immigration law is civil law in the U.S. -- not criminal law -- there is no constitutionally protected right to have an attorney appointed to help a noncitizen with their case in court. They do have a right to counsel at their own expense, which can be an attorney who is paid or unpaid ("pro bono"). The immigration courts are allowed to provide to Respondents only a specific list of vetted organizations, known as the "pro bono" list to help Respondents find legal counsel (<https://www.justice.gov/eoir/list-pro-bono-legal-service-providers>). In San Francisco, the Bar Association has a more comprehensive list that San Francisco Immigration Judges usually also provide.

(<https://www.sfbar.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/JDC-Packet-7.30.24.pdf>)

### **Prosecutors - Assistant Chief Counsel (ACC)**

They are the prosecutors who defend the U.S. government's position to remove (deport) someone who does not have legal documentation to remain in the U.S. They work for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under the Immigration & Customs Enforcement branch (ICE). The specific department is called OPLA, Office of the Principal Legal Advisor.

### **Right to Asylum**

Modern refugee law came into existence after World War II through various international legal conventions to codify and (theoretically) prevent other genocides from happening, including the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. While the U.S. did not sign this Convention, it did sign and ratify the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees which was incorporated into U.S. law through the Refugee Act of 1980. The current U.S. immigration courts were created in 1983 to implement these measures. See <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/evolution-pre-1983>

Under international human rights law, the principle of **non-refoulement** (refoulement is the French word for "to push back") States are forbidden from sending individuals back to a place where their life, liberty, or physical safety would be threatened due to protected grounds, namely, race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. This also applies to risks of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, or other irreparable harm. This principle applies to all migrants at all times, regardless of migration status.