

**Meeting:**                   **Town Hall – The Immigration Crisis: Stories from the Front Line**

**Date:**                        Tuesday, September 10, 2019, 7:00-8:50PM

**Location:**                Trinity Faith Christian Center, 15516 New Road, Lewes, DE 19958

**Chairperson:**           Charlotte King

**Moderator:**             Don Peterson

**Speakers:**               Dalissy Washington, LCSW, Co-Coordinator Safe Communities Campaign  
Linda Dean  
Kathryn Harris  
Zita Dresner

**Recorder:**              Ann Loar Brooks

### Introduction & Opening

Charlotte King opened the meeting and welcomed an audience of about 50 community members.

### Announcements

- October 8, 2019 – Town Hall
  - Discussion of SDARJ efforts to save the Nassau School in Belltown
  - Sylvester Woolford will speak about efforts to save Dupont Schools in Delaware
  
- November 12, 2019 – Town Hall
  - Peace & Civil Rights Songs Sing-along
  - Contact Charlotte McNaughton, [pubtech1@gmail.com](mailto:pubtech1@gmail.com), to be part of program
  
- Volunteer application forms are now available on [www.sdarj.org](http://www.sdarj.org)

- An article about separating immigrant children from families will be in the Cape Gazette. Charlotte urged members to send letters and article responses to the paper.
- Peace Week will be September 22-29. Three six-week Dialogue to Action groups will kick-off that week. They are filled but future groups will be organized to accommodate more participants.

## Program

Don Peterson introduced Ms. Washington and Ms. Dean and explained that the DACA students who originally had been scheduled to speak were not available and would join us as a future date.

### *Dalissy Washington:*

Ms. Washington sees the biggest effect of immigration policies on people of color. Previous immigrants primarily were men seeking employment in the U.S. Today, most immigrants are families seeking escape from crime and subjugation, refugees fleeing for their lives. Among these people, children and women are especially vulnerable.

Her work focuses on policy change to eliminate discrimination against immigrants, especially those seeking asylum and victims of crime or family violence and increasing awareness of inequities for immigrants. She hosts rallies in order to support this work.

Recent efforts resulted in a resolution to create safe communities (sanctuary locations) in New Castle County, Newark, and two school districts in northern Delaware.

She believes that current day immigrants see a bigger risk staying in their home countries than in immigrating elsewhere. In addition, the prolonged and toxic stress experienced by immigrants in the U.S., e.g., due to deportation threats, leads to significant mental health consequences, known as ACE's (adverse childhood experiences) in children. As a result, she is working to enable immigrant children to be included in treatment under Delaware's trauma-informed state policies.

Ms. Washington described a DACA student who arrived in the US at age 5 and recently graduated from DelTech with a criminal justice degree. Because she has no Social Security number and has no pathway to citizenship, she cannot get a job in the criminal justice system. An additional hardship is that her father was detained by ICE for four weeks, requiring her to increase her work to cover his lost wages and to care for her family's younger children.

Ways that SDARJ can support the Safe Communities Network is through fundraising, letters to editors and op-ed pieces, become a leader for the network in lower Delaware, become a storyteller of immigrant stories, and investigate the link to her organization on [www.sdarj.org](http://www.sdarj.org).

*Linda Dean:*

Ms. Dean is a Delaware citizen who works in the public health field and who recently traveled to the border in Arizona with a group of concerned citizens. She was inspired to act after seeing news reports of immigrant children in cages. For two weeks, she and the rest of the group of concerned clergy and parishioners were “witnesses at the border” – observing humanitarian aid workers provide food, water, and shelter, attending a court session where 54 men and 4 women (all shackled and persons of color) were processed in less than 50 minutes, and traveling to the border at Nogales, AZ and Nogales, Mexico.

After the 58 immigrants were processed in court, the judge spoke directly to the group, explaining that he had been brought out of retirement to handle the increase in cases, almost all of which are related to immigration and drugs. Immigrants invariably plead guilty so that they can become wage earners again to support their families and are returned to their countries of origin as soon as ICE can fill a chartered jet. Most of the immigrants come due to climate change’s effect on agriculture and the effect of gang violence and drugs on their communities. When asked how we in SDARJ can help change this scenario, Ms. Dean urged us to move out of our regular social circles and dialogue with people who share differing points of view on this topic.

At the border between AZ and Mexico, Ms. Dean saw a steel wall topped by rows of concertina wire. She did not pass through a checkpoint to enter Mexico but did when she returned to the US. The border wall on the Mexico side is covered with beautiful art and crosses dedicated to those who perished trying to cross the border. One Mexican teenager was shot multiple times by a US border agent. He had been tossing rocks across the wall. To “protect” himself from the stones, the border agent killed the boy. Later the agent was acquitted in US courts of any wrongdoing.

Immigrants who wish to cross the border usually deal with drug cartel members who require immigrants to purchase particular paraphernalia, e.g., backpacks and black water bottles. To track the immigrants, border patrol places small cameras on observed trails that film when triggered by footsteps. Humanitarian organizations leave water and food near these trails. But persons in the US, vigilantes and others, often slash the water tanks and/or steal the food. Ms. Dean saw a man with a machine gun in a large pick-up truck near one of the trails. She has no idea if he has ever used the gun on immigrants.

Her big takeaways were:

- Immigration is based on exploitation and racism. In the 1980’s, the US, due to fear of the spread of Communism, inserted itself in Central American politics. The result was destabilized governments and communities south of our border.
- Border patrol is biased against people of color. She and other white persons she was with were never stopped when crossing the border. But people of color were almost invariably stopped for secondary inspections that could last from fifteen minutes to several hours, thereby jeopardizing their employment.

Ms. Dean believes, unless one is an attorney with immigration experience and/or is fluent in Spanish, people do not need to go to the border in order to work for improved immigration policies. Instead:

- Work to move Homeland Security out of the Executive Branch where it reports only to the President.
- Sponsor asylum seekers. Because the Immigration Department confiscates immigrants' belongings and money, they arrive with no possessions and need assistance to establish themselves in their new communities.

Don Peterson introduced two local people involved in work to alleviate immigration issues.

*Kathryn Harris* spoke of the silent vigil (attended by ~175 people) that was held on July 17 and the activities grew from it. After that first vigil, 70 people met and formed three groups – one to form a national caravan to head to the border, one to continue holding silent vigils, and one to work on policy change. Two more vigils have already been held and the next one will be held September 15 from 4:00-4:45 outside the Zwaanendael Museum in Lewes. Kathleen Jennings, Attorney General for Delaware, walked along the sidewalk during one of the recent vigils quietly thanking the silent protesters for their presence there.

The caravan group (chaired by Charlotte King) determined that the idea for a national caravan would not be feasible. Instead, they decided to work with the *Shut Down Berks Campaign* to close the Berks County Family Detention Center in Pennsylvania, one of three national immigrant detention centers. *Zita Dresner* encouraged attendees to join the protest on 3:30PM on September 15 outside the Berks center.

#### *Q&A*

Susan Geckler wanted to know more about the process to have Delaware declared a sanctuary state. According to Ms. Washington, the New Jersey attorney general passed an executive order declaring that state to be a sanctuary for immigrants, and she recommended that we lobby our legislators in Dover to pass laws in order to garner that designation for Delaware.

#### Closing

The meeting ended at approximately 8:30PM.