Reader: As we come together today, we bring into this circle of love and concern and commitment all of our sisters and brothers fleeing persecution all over the world, especially those on our southern border. We join with thousands of persons who gather to express our distress and outrage at the way these dear neighbors are being treated by agents of our own government. We pray for those who make policies that abuse refugees and migrants and for those who implement those practices. We ask God for forgiveness for any way in which we are complicit in this system. God offers us a change of heart, courage and strength to pursue justice and care for every dear neighbor without exception from whom we do not separate ourselves. We are one. Let us accept these graces and encourage one another.

Song: Play [CD] *Turning of the World*, sung by Sara Thomsen

Reader:

In the last eight months, six migrant children are known to have died after being taken into U.S. immigration custody.

These names we must remember are

16-year-old Carlos Hernandez Vasquez,

2 ½-year-old Wilmer Josué Ramírez Vásquez**,**

16-year-old Juan de León Gutiérrez, **7-year-old** Jakelin Caal Maquin,

8-year-old Felipe Alonzo-Gomez,

10-year-old Darlyn Cristabel Cordova-Valle.

Another **20-month-old** girl, Mariee Juárez, died shortly after being held with her mother at a family detention center in Texas

Reader: Now we will listen to testimony of children detained at our border and to excerpts from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Qur'an:

Group One:

Reader: I was given a blanket and a mattress, but then, at 3:00 a.m., the guards took the blanket and mattress. In fact, almost every night, the guards wake us at 3:00 a.m. and take away our sleeping mattresses and blankets. They leave babies, even little babies of two or three months, sleeping on the cold floor. For me, because I am so pregnant, sleeping on the floor is very painful for my back and hips. I think the guards act this way to punish us.

Reader We have one mat we need to share with each other. It is very cold. We each got a mylar blanket, but it is not enough to warm up. There are benches but we cannot sleep there. Sometimes it is so crowded we cannot find a place to sleep, so they allow a few of us to sleep outside the fenced area. The lights are on all of the time.

Reader: *From Leviticus: When foreigners reside among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.*

Reader: *From Matthew: For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

Reader: *From the Holy Quran: Those who migrate for the sake of Allah after they have been wronged, we will surely settle them in a good place in the world, and the reward of the Hereafter is surely greater, had they known.*

- Holy Quran 6:41

If any one of them seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of Allah. Then deliver him to his place of safety.

- Holy Quran 9:6

SILENT PAUSE

Group Two:

Reader: I started taking care of a little one, age 5 in the Ice Box after they separated her from her father. I did not know either of them before that. She was very upset. The workers did nothing to try to comfort her. I tried to comfort her and she has been with me ever since. She sleeps on a mat with me on the concrete floor. We spend all day every day in that room. There are no activities, only crying.

Reader: There are little kids here who have no one to take care of them, not even a big brother or sister. Some kids are only two or three years old and they have no one to take care of them.

I am in a room with dozens of other boys. Some have been as young as 3 or 4 years old. Some cry. Right now, there is a 12-year-old who cries a lot. Others try to comfort him. One of the officers makes fun of those who cry."

Reader: *From Deuteronomy: For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.*

Reader*:* *From Luke: Don't hold back—give freely, and you'll have plenty poured back into your lap—a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, brimming over. You'll receive in the same measure you give.*

Reader: *From the Holy Quran: There is no leader who closes the door to someone in need, one suffering in poverty, except that Allah closes the gates of the heavens for him when he is suffering in poverty.*

- Hadith Al-Tirmidhi 1332

The example of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts

- Hadith Bukhari 5665

SILENT PAUSE

Group Three:

Reader: I was apprehended with my father. The immigration agents separated me from my father right away. I was very frightened and scared. I cried. I have not seen my father again... I have had a cold and cough for several days. I have not seen a doctor and I have not been given any medicine.

Reader: They took us away from our grandmother and now we are all alone. They have not given us to our mother. We have been here for a long time. I have to take care of my little sister. She is very sad because she misses our mother and grandmother very much... We sleep on a cement bench. There are two mats in the room, but the big kids sleep on the mats so we have to sleep on the cement bench.

Reader: *From Deuteronomy: God defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.*

Reader: *From Galatians: For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Reader: *From the Holy Quran: 'Whatever wealth you spend, let it be for parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, and the traveller.' And whatever good that you may do, Allah indeed knows it.*

- Holy Quran 2:215

and be good to parents, the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the near neighbour and the far immigrant, the companion at your side, the traveller.

- Holy Quran 4:36

and about the weak among children: that you should maintain the orphans with justice, and whatever good you do, indeed Allah knows it well.

- Holy Quran 4:127

SILENT PAUSE

FINAL PRAYER

Reader: Loving God,
We come before you to pray for our brothers and sisters,
your children and members of Christ's body,
at the southern border of the United States today.

What we read of their suffering
seems nothing less than a Passion for thousands.
Little children crowded into cells
where they scarcely have room to stand.
Without decent sanitation or food,
separated from their families,
the older ones taking care of the younger.

Reader: God of mercy,
We believe that you live within whatever and whoever we are,
the ground of my existence, its gracious cause and hope,
its true future, its blessed promise of eternal life.
We could not always have said so much.
But now through your grace we do believe it.

But God of all,
We are shaken in that faith
when we read of what is happening on the threshold of my country.
Are not the women and men and children there also vessels of your eternal presence?
Many of them, most perhaps, from what we call the Northern Triangle,
have indeed been baptized.
But your incarnate Word is addressed to all of them.
Your Spirit of freedom hovers over all of them.

Reader: Who will speak your Word and give your Spirit to them now?
How will the freedom and responsibility,
the integrity and compassion Christ came to secure for us all
come now to our country and its leaders
in this time of squalor and rejection,
if those are even words strong enough for what is happening?

Can we continue to believe
that you are more interior to our souls than we are to ourselves
without confessing the same truth for every soul
on the border in Arizona and New Mexico and Texas?

Oh, gracious God,
you are silent.
But give us, we beg, the words and wisdom,
the courage and yes also the tact,
not to speak empty words about your presence
while others of your children,
your children and ours,
are suffering what seems worse than death.

We pray in Your Holy Name. [AMEN]

Leo O'Donovan SJ