

## **A Statement from Riviera Presbyterian Church in Opposition to “Alligator Alcatraz”**

The Congregation of Riviera Presbyterian Church, as followers of Christ and members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has a strong history of engaging with the concept of the "sojourner" in relation to refugees and immigrants. We recognize the challenges faced by these individuals and actively work towards welcoming, supporting, and advocating for them.

We believe that democracy is rooted in the Image of God. In the creation story in Genesis, God says, “Let us make humankind in our image.” We believe that every human face matters because our faces are reflections of the Creator. Every person, every face, counts and deserves to fully participate in our democracy. Based on our Presbyterian tradition, we welcome the stranger, uphold human dignity, and are compelled to challenge policies that diminish both.

In this Statement, we the Congregation of Riviera Presbyterian Church, located in Miami, Florida, call for the closure of the ICE detention center known as “Alligator Alcatraz.” The basis for this call is described in the points listed below.

### **1. Human Worth and Dignity**

People in immigration detention are being treated as less than human. For example, detainees have been held in alternating freezing and overheated conditions. Detainees have been denied access to hygiene and subjected to prolonged and unjustifiable shackling during transportation. “Alligator Alcatraz” detainees have been unable to get necessary medical care, including for chronic conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and HIV. Politicians have used the threat of alligators surrounding the “Alligator Alcatraz” compound as a deterrent for escape. Such imagery turns human beings into threats, is reflective of racist memes and places them in conditions that are at best undignified and at worst, criminal.

Operation of “Alligator Alcatraz” promotes practices which are degrading, deeply contrary to the core values that the United States has traditionally upheld and violates our commitment to recognizing every person as created in the image of God.

### **2. Due Process and Family Unity**

The anti-immigrant enforcement policies and tactics under the current administration are terrorizing communities and ripping families apart, especially cruel in Miami whose vibrancy is due to our immigrant communities. Mothers, fathers, siblings and children of US citizens are being taken from their communities and disappeared into a detention system that is deeply harmful and dehumanizing. “Alligator Alcatraz” threatens due process by fostering rapid deportations without adequate legal support, separating families and causing trauma to children—contrary to our call for compassion and respect for family integrity. Presbyterians have repeatedly decried the use of family detention,

urging Congress and the executive branch to end policies that criminalize families, some of whom have been in the United States for years and are guilty of nothing more than seeking a better life.

### **3. Creation and Love of Neighbor**

“Alligator Alcatraz’s” location in the ecologically fragile Everglades raises concerns about environmental harm and shows disrespect for God’s creation. Over 90 percent of this area is wetlands and is home to some of Florida’s most beloved macrofauna, including the endangered Florida panther. By introducing trucks, lights, and people into the area, the camp removes critical habitat for these big cats, as well as other important species.

The Everglades surrounding “Alligator Alcatraz” is not an empty stretch of wilderness that can be used as a background for political gain. Rather, the Everglades is the living, breathing homeland of indigenous people and is an area deeply tied to the cultural, spiritual and historical identity of both the Miccosukee and Seminole Tribe of Florida.

The Everglades remains a sacred place to the indigenous people who have called it home, and has become sacred to the newcomers who have discovered its majesty. Florida’s Everglades are one of this country’s treasures, and the messaging about it being a dangerous swamp, fit only to punish criminals, does not only Miami but all of Florida a great disservice,

Our Presbyterian commitments to environmental stewardship and love of neighbor call us to oppose policies that degrade creation and ignore and dishonor the values, rituals and the homeland of indigenous people.

### **4. A Sinful Initiative**

Reflecting voices across Christian traditions, clergy such as Archbishop Thomas Wenski of the Catholic Archdiocese of Miami, have already declared ICE detention policies and in particular “Alligator Alcatraz,” as sinful. As Presbyterians, we too call the operation of “Alligator Alcatraz” as morally wrong. We reject any approach that seeks to intimidate or dehumanize migrants rather than engage them with justice, hospitality, and respect.

### **5. Compassionate Witness**

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a long history of accompanying and protecting migrants through sanctuary movements and public witness. Guided by our faith's call to welcome the stranger and belief in the inherent dignity of all people, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) actively advocates for and works toward more just immigration laws and processes. In the Bible, God is constantly instructing His people through the prophets and the gospels to care for widows, orphans and sojourners, who were disenfranchised

by the patriarchal societies described in the Bible and had no rights granted to them by the cultural norms of the day.

In the same way and in our current cultural conditions, we believe that God still calls us today to right the wrongs caused by the norms, and sometimes the laws, that are disenfranchising people and creating unjust conditions.

**Closing**

In the words of Jesus, *“I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”* Let us live into this, our calling. May the dignity of every human being, and our shared call to love the sojourner, immigrant and stranger, be our guiding light as we call for the closure of *“Alligator Alcatraz.”*