

March 5, 2015

Dear brothers and sisters gathered in Cedar Rapids,

Tonight I join you in praying for our brother Max Villatoro, his family, church and friends. We suffer with you in the pain of a cruel surprise, when government forces tore our brother in Christ away from his family in the early morning hours and threw him into jail for not having proper immigration documents. We pray that even in this trying time, the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

In this season of Lent, we remember that Jesus's path of peace sometimes led to confronting the oppressive systems of His time. An immigration system that detains people like Max and separates families is not merely broken; it is morally bankrupt and must be challenged. Therefore, we pray that God may work in the hearts of those who have the power to secure Max's release, and make it possible for him to continue his good work of church leadership in this country. In that vein, I urge members of Mennonite Church USA to contact the appropriate offices in Iowa to call for Max Villatoro's immediate release.

Brothers and sisters of Central Plains, I am grateful to you for your show of support for Max and his family. Your faithfulness and love encourages us all to pray for peace and work for justice in our own communities. May we all follow the example you've set.

In Christ,

Ervin R. Stutzman

Executive Director for Mennonite Church USA