News



Mike Ishii and Joe Okimoto, along with other Japanese Americans, leave origami cranes on the fence at the Dilley Family Detention Center on June 27, 2026, in Dilley, Texas. (Texas Tribune/Brenda Bazán)

Chloe Landen

View Author Profile

Ellie Ashby

View Author Profile

Religion News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

DILLEY, Texas — June 29, 2026
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Roughly two dozen immigration advocates, faith leaders, Japanese internment camp survivors and their descendants completed a four-day, 45-mile pilgrimage Saturday to an immigrant detention facility outside of Dilley.

The activists demanded the closure of the only federal family detention center, described by a Japanese internment survivor as inhumane and a tragic "repetition of American history."

Free Families, a national coalition of organizations advocating for immigrant families, organized the pilgrimage with Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministries, Grassroots Leadership and Tsuru for Solidarity, a group of Japanese American concentration camp survivors and descendants who work to end detention. The goal of the pilgrimage was "to shut down Dilley, end family detention in its entirety, and stop family separation caused by ICE targeting and detention."

Action was a central theme of the pilgrimage. "Join us everywhere," said Mike Ishii, executive director and co-founder of Tsuru for Solidarity. "March in solidarity, walk in spiritual faith and strength, just as we are doing today."

"Together, as a country, we will transform the violence, and we will open the future to a new path," he said.

The pilgrimage began Wednesday morning at the Crystal City Concentration Camp, where Japanese American families were imprisoned in Texas during World War II.

Walking up to 12 miles each morning, the group arrived at Dilley's South Texas Family Residential Center around 10 a.m. Saturday.

Interfaith leaders and activists prayed, delivered a meditative chant and tied chains of multicolored origami cranes to the facility's 10-foot chain-link fence topped with razor wire.

The paper cranes were folded by Japanese American concentration camp survivors and their descendants.

"We bring (these cranes) on their behalf and in solidarity with the children and the families being subjected to violence inside of Dilley and in every detention site across the country," Ishii said. "The message from us is this must stop."

"We will transform the violence," Ishii said, as 16-wheelers barreled down the nearby highway. "We will open the future to a new path."

The Dilley facility is the nation's only immigrant detention center that imprisons parents with their children. About 70 miles southwest of San Antonio, the facility has held children ranging from infants to teenagers.

The South Texas Family Residential Center opened in 2014, becoming the Department of Homeland Security's largest immigrant family detention center. It can hold 2,400 people and was designed to accommodate women and children.



Origami cranes hang from the fence on the perimeter of the Dilley Detention Center after Japanese Americans held a ceremony completing their pilgrimage from Crystal City, on June 27, 2026, in Dilley, Texas. (Texas Tribune/Brenda Bazán)

The facility has been the site of intense protests, with critics saying it is inhumane to detain young children and mothers as criminals when they pose no security risk.

Criticism led to the closure of Dilley's facility during the Biden administration. In March 2025, the Trump administration reopened the facility with CoreCivic, a private prison corporation. Under the Trump administration, the daily number of children detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement increased over sixfold, with Dilley's facility as the primary detention center for children.

This year, Dilley has made national headlines. After photos of immigration agents detaining 5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos in Minnesota went viral, protesters clashed

with authorities outside the facility, where he was transferred. During a January protest at the center's gates, authorities used tear gas and pepper ball grenades on hundreds of faith leaders, advocates and residents. Two people were arrested.

A few days later, the Dilley facility reported two cases of measles. Those incarcerated at the facility have reported moldy, worm-riddled food and neglectful medical care. Ms. Rachel, a popular children's entertainer, recently called Dilley's detainment of children "child abuse."

For survivors of Japanese internment, Dilley's family detention facility hearkens to the U.S. concentration camps that shuttered 80 years ago.

In 1942, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, nearly all persons of Japanese ancestry in the mainland U.S. were forced into internment camps for the remainder of World War II. More than 120,000 people were incarcerated, over two-thirds of whom were U.S. citizens. Still alive today are several survivors who were incarcerated as children.

Standing outside the Dilley detention center's fence, the Rev. Kenji Akaposhi, a retired Buddhist minister and survivor of Japanese internment, told pilgrims, "I was 2 weeks old when my family was incarcerated. Because of that trauma that I suffered — that has been with me my entire life — I am here to help those, especially the children, whose lives are being affected as we speak."

Advertisement

Satsuki Ina, 82, was born inside Crystal City camp, where her family was held for more than four years. Saturday marked Ina's second pilgrimage to Dilley's detention facility, and she was accompanied by other survivors, including Chizu Omori, 96, who was also returning to Dilley for the second time.

"It's heartbreaking to know we are back here again," Ina said.

"We might be old, we might be here with our canes and our hearing aids and our walkers and our dentures, but we're mad," she said.

Ina was accompanied by her 22-year-old granddaughter, Skyla Tomine, who is the national organizing fellow for Tsuru for Solidarity and a descendant of relatives from

three different internment camps.

"I am heartbroken again that she has to even be here," Ina said. "What is happening today is a repetition of American history, over and over and over again."

Pastor Dianne Garcia, who leads a Mennonite community, opened the ceremony with a faith-based reflection.

"We know that God cries out for justice with us, as we have cried out for justice," she said.

Garcia's 12-year-old daughter, Clara, led the group in a song that was produced in collaboration with children inside Dilley's detention facility.

"I sing from here, and you sing from there. Together we'll sing down the walls everywhere. Love in our hearts like the waves of the sea. Together we'll sing until everyone's free," she sang.

The ceremony closed with Ishii leading a chant frequently recited in Japanese internment camps. "Kodomo no tame ni. There are children, set them free," the group shouted.