



Charlene Walker speaks while faith leaders rally outside the Delaney Hall detention center on Monday, July 13, 2026, in Newark, N.J. (RNS/Jack Jenkins)

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Amid the recent killings of two immigrants by immigration enforcement agents, around 100 religious leaders from across the country staged a protest outside the Delaney Hall immigrant detention center on Monday (July 13) afternoon, demanding the closure of the privately run facility over what they say are inhumane conditions.

The protest, chiefly organized by Faith in New Jersey, came after Lorenzo Salgado Araujo in Houston and Joan Sebastian Guerrero in Biddeford, Maine, were fatally shot by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents; for about a year, there have been recurring protests outside of Delaney Hall.

Marching to a chain link fence outside the facility on Monday, clergy in collars, yarmulkes and taqiyahs affixed banners with the image of a monarch butterfly to the barrier and tied multicolored ribbons to another gate featuring dozens of names of immigrants, including Jean Wilson Brutus, a 41-year-old who [died last year](#) shortly after being detained in Delaney Hall.

"They are in the colors of the monarch butterfly to demonstrate that migration is beautiful and that transformation can occur at any moment," the Rev. Robin Tanner, president of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and a minister who helped organize the protest, said. She explained the immigrants named had either been detained or, if their names appeared on black ribbons, killed by federal agents or died while in detention.

"I am sick and tired of waking up every morning to see another loved one is dead," said Charlene Walker, a Faith in New Jersey leader who was arrested last year when her group staged one of the [first major protests](#) outside Delaney Hall. "Dead at the hand of the for-profit systems that prop up this country."

The protest was part of a three-day gathering in New Jersey of faith leaders from around the country focused on pushback to the Department of Homeland Security and ICE, who are implementing ongoing mass deportation efforts by the Trump

administration. While Delaney Hall has long been a target of protests, the interfaith gathering, bringing clergy from across the country, hinted at a new, more nationally focused phase of faith-led demonstrations.

The gathering harkened back to a similar assembly in January when, after Renee Good was killed by an ICE agent, more than 600 clergy from across the U.S. [assembled in Minneapolis](#) to protest the deportation campaign in the city, also known as Operation Metro Surge. Some of the Minnesota faith leaders who organized that effort were at the New Jersey gathering, including the [Rev. Ashley Horan](#), vice president for programs and ministries at the Unitarian Universalist Association.

"Part of what we were so clear about coming out of Operation Metro Surge in Minneapolis was that, just because they had taken our neighbors, did not mean that we were going to forget them or that we were going to stop fighting for them," Horan told RNS. "So we have been working at March to build connections with folks here in New Jersey, with folks in Texas."

Unlike Minneapolis gathering, the New Jersey assembly largely focused on immigrant detention. The protesters at Delaney Hall railed against Trump and DHS, but also singled out the GEO Group, the private company that operates the facility as part of a contract with DHS. At one point, the group burst into a chant of "evict GEO now."

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The same slogan was also affixed to the historic pulpit of First Presbyterian Church Newark earlier that day, where the faith leaders gathered for songs and a series of speeches championing immigrant rights. As attendees of the "All Roads Lead to Delaney Hall" event sat in the pews, many cooling themselves with church fans to cut the thick heat that filled the centuries-old sanctuary, which lacked air conditioning, speakers from various religious traditions spoke of a spiritual obligation to oppose Trump and DHS.

One of the speakers was the Rev. Nontombi Naomi Tutu, the daughter of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Anglican priest who famously resisted apartheid in South Africa. An immigrant who serves as an Episcopal priest in California, the younger Tutu said she has walked around with her passport in recent months out of fear of being

detained by DHS.

"I lived through apartheid in South Africa," Tutu said. "I'm not going to live through apartheid in the U.S."

The room erupted into applause.

Another speaker, Jamie Beran, head of Bend the Arc: Jewish Action, said American Jews are pushing back against DHS as part of a larger effort to "reassert our American Jewish values."

"Our faith coalition, this faith coalition, has consistently shown us that there is always hope in the face of tyranny," Beran said. "Because hope is another word for faith."

Many faith groups were represented in the crowd, but Unitarian Universalists — including the Rev. Sofía Betancourt, the president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, as well as Walker, Tanner and Horan — were a visible presence, many wearing yellow stoles commonly used by ministers in the denomination.

Several speakers tied opposition to mass deportation to broader concerns about authoritarianism, which they argued was being implemented by the Trump administration.

"This has nothing to do with immigration. This is all about fascism," said Walker. "ICE is a paramilitary force they have chosen to build to come after each and every one of us."

In an interview with RNS, Walker said she and other faith leaders have been [exposed to pepper spray and tear gas](#) while ministering or protesting outside Delaney Hall. Many other activists have also had violent encounters with DHS and local police who have guarded the facility, as well as GEO group employees.

At this protest, however, DHS agents were nowhere to be seen. GEO Group employees stood behind fences, largely avoiding any direct engagement with clergy during the demonstration. When the clergy moved away from the fences, GEO Group employees in blue shirts quietly removed the banners, but left the ribbons attached.

Faith leaders who have been involved in protests at Delaney Hall told RNS the lack of response was unusual, but speculated that authorities may have wanted to avoid directly confronting such a large group of faith leaders. Reached for comment, representatives for GEO Group deferred to ICE. A DHS spokesperson responded to a request for comment on the faith-led protest by pointing to a [press release from May](#) rejecting various allegations of inhumane conditions at Delaney Hall as "smears" forwarded by "sanctuary politicians" and "leftist activists."

About midway through the gathering, the Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael, co-minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair, stood and noted that reports had emerged of a person being shot and killed in a shooting in Maine that involved ICE personnel. She led the group in a moment of silence, then offered an additional prayer.

"May it be a silence that is a reckoning, a silence that is a reckoning that moves through this room and through these people as we again come together to hold the crimes of our nation in our hearts and our bodies," she said.

Among the last to speak was [Bishop Dwayne Royster](#), head of the group Faith and Action Network, of which Faith in NJ is an affiliate. He urged attendees to take lessons learned from the gathering home with them and begin organizing in their own communities.

"We've got to make sure that we wake up every day determined that we will not allow another person to suffer in this world," Royster said. "We're going to do everything that God has given us — every power that we have, every bit of agency — to make sure that we change this world into a better place."

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. [View the full series.](#)