

Deacon Speaks for Voiceless Immigrants

"Immigrants are some of the most faithful and hope-filled people I have ever met with dreams just like ours," Deacon Leeann Culbreath told participants in a panel discussion in Savannah. "No matter what we might think about the issue of immigration, there are thousands of good people suffering and treated like criminals in Georgia's hidden detention centers each year and they need our care."



Culbreath joined the panel for The Common Root: Immigration Stories at Home in Savannah, an event sponsored by Emergent Savannah and held at the Sentient Bean Monday. Also on the panel were Krystal Sanchez of Mexico, the 2017 Deep Laureate; Jimmy Buttimer who spoke on the history of Irish and African American residents; Hossein Motlagh, a Savannah businessman who emigrated from

Iran in the 1980's, and Joe Steffen, legal counsel for Savannah State University on the state of immigration on the university's campus.

"Thousands of immigrants cannot share their stories here tonight because they are behind bars in immigration detention centers, which some call immigration jail," said Culbreath who went on to share those stories and talk about her work with those who are detained, particularly at the Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Georgia.

Culbreath is working with a local ecumenical group to develop a visitation and support program for detainees at Irwin and their loved ones. She described widespread human rights abuses in for-profit detention centers across the country and a lack of due process for detainees. "While the issues and stories are depressing, the visits, and subsequent correspondence, fill me with hope and love," she said. "It is truly incredible to be able to connect and become friends despite all of the barriers that would keep us apart."

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