

Statement on the U.S. Immigration Situation
Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church
May 2009

In Scripture we see evidence that God cares for sojourners. In the Old Testament we are reminded that we are to care for the sojourners among us as native born, loving them as we love ourselves, and never oppressing them (Leviticus 19:33). Most telling, God chose to be incarnated as a migrant in Jesus, who as a tender child became a refugee to Africa, and as an adult became an itinerant teacher of good news to all people. Jesus identifies himself with the sojourner in our midst and calls his followers to provide hospitality to the sojourner (Matthew 25:38-40). As we follow Jesus in serving the sojourner, we hear the good news of the gospel incarnated in their stories and in their lives. We believe that welcoming the sojourner is so vital to the expression of Christian faith that to engage in this form of hospitality is to participate in our own salvation.

Throughout the world we experience redemptive liberation through relationships with migrants in our communities. These relationships help us to see that regardless of legal status or nationality, we are all connected through Christ to one another. The Apostle Paul reminds us that when one member suffers, all members suffer as well (1 Corinthians 12:26). The solidarity we share through Christ eliminates the boundaries and barriers which exclude and isolate. The sojourners we are called to love are our brothers and sisters, our mothers and fathers, our sons and daughters; indeed, they are us.

As we serve in communities all across the United States, we are made aware of the daily suffering of immigrants who live and work among us. Our immigrant brothers and sisters suffer greatly due to abuse in the work place, indiscriminate federal raids, and indefinite detention and deportations which tear their families apart. These conditions are exacerbated by a broken immigration system that not only separates families for long and indefinite periods of time, but that ignores the fact that immigrants provide a much needed labor force in the United States and come to this country often encouraged by potential U.S. employers who actively seek their labor. Consideration of U.S. immigration policy must take into consideration the fact that today many immigrants are forced to leave their homes due to economic and foreign policies of the United States. In addition, the growing militarism along the border with Mexico further aggravates the suffering of immigrants and border communities as it exposes immigrants and communities to greater violence and mistreatment. Because of all of these circumstances immigrants are forced to live in the shadows of society to avoid being exploited thus living lives of constant fear and insecurity.

Our calling as followers of Jesus the Christ is to stand in solidarity with our immigrant neighbors and to advocate for justice on their behalf. The United Methodist Church affirms the inherent dignity, value, and human rights of all immigrants regardless of their legal status. We acknowledge that all nations have the right to secure their borders, but the primary concern for Christians is the welfare of immigrants and communities.

The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church is committed to advocate for comprehensive immigration reform that is humane and effective and that upholds the human and civil rights of immigrants. We affirm President Obama for his leadership in moving the immigration agenda to the forefront of public discourse and decision making.

We call upon President Obama and all Congressional leaders to support comprehensive immigration reform that would:

- Provide a pathway to citizenship for immigrants;
- Reunify immigrant families that have been separated by immigration itself or due to work place raids and ensuing indefinite detentions and deportations;
- Increase the number of visas for short-term workers to come into the United States to work in a safe, legal, and orderly way.
- Extend legal protection to all workers who come to stay for a certain period of time as well as for those who stay permanently including the right to bargain for higher wages, to protest against poor working conditions, and to preserve their human rights as workers, be they documented or undocumented;
- Eliminate privately-operated detention centers, which are not regulated by the federal or state governments, and end all indiscriminate raids.

Just and humane immigration reform will put an end to much of the human suffering of our immigrant brothers and sisters, bringing them out of the shadows of society, and integrating them into society in ways that will bring their gifts and hard work to bear as together we strive to build communities of justice.

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