



RESOLUTION ON IMMIGRATION AND A CALL FOR ACTION

FOR CONSIDERATION AND ADOPTION BY THE BOARDS OF THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES USA (*ADOPTED 9/22/08*), AND CHURCH WORLD SERVICE
AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES USA AND CHURCH WORLD SERVICE
(ADOPTED ON 11/12/2008)

“In a world fragmented by fearfulness, Christians proclaim a divine love that casts out fear (I John 4: 18) and binds even those the world calls enemies (Matthew 5: 44). In a society still divided by race and increasingly divided into haves and have nots, Christians affirm a vision of community in which every neighbor is valued as a child of God (Genesis 1: 27) and all neighbors have enough (Luke 6). In a world fractured by suspicion of those who are “other,” Christians have heard a command to welcome strangers (Genesis 18, Hebrews 13:2), even as Christ has welcomed us (Romans 15: 7).”^{i ii}

NCC Policy Baseⁱⁱⁱ

UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION POLICY

Adopted by The General Board on March 21, 1952

THE CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION

Adopted by the General Board of the National Council of Churches USA on February 27, 1962

IMMIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Adopted by the Governing Board on May 14, 1981

INTRODUCTION

This resolution and call to action about the issue of immigration from a faithful Biblical perspective is a collaboration of the member communions of the National Council of Churches USA and Church World Service, with local and regional ecumenical bodies of the United States. Millions of people are on the move around the world: some by choice, some under duress, but most out of dire, life-or-death necessity. All desire to make a better life for themselves and their families, as have millions of immigrants to our shores from past eras. Many perceive this country as the best or only choice available to them. How our nation responds to this growing challenge is clearly one of the great moral issues of our time.

As we witness the consequences of an outdated and ineffective immigration system, we are compelled to stand in solidarity with those impacted by our nation’s policies. The current U.S. immigration process separates family members, many who have waited decades to be reunited, and hurts productivity as those wishing to work in this country, also endure lengthy backlogs. Such a system leaves many facing the choice between feeding their children and crossing a border illegally. Reaching a point of desperation, many risk their lives to cross the desert, where hundreds of them die every year.

Thousands of immigrants have been arrested in mass raids and hundreds of thousands have been detained or deported, with little or no access to legal counsel. Children have been detained in detention centers lacking proper educational or religious services, and at least 83 people have died in such facilities due to inadequate medical treatment. Such “enforcement” measures leave children without parents, families separated without knowledge of loved ones’ whereabouts, and those who arrived as infants deported to countries they never called home. Many immigrants who endure detention and deportation are lawful permanent residents; many seek asylum from persecution; and still others simply seek the better life the United States promises.

Unfortunately, when these issues are discussed, polarized sides have blamed immigrants for the nation’s problems, rather than uniting to enact policies that are beneficial to all persons. Anti-immigrant sentiment has

become such an accepted norm throughout the United States that some local laws bar immigrants from receiving social services and deny funding to charitable organizations that do not check immigration status prior to administering services. Local police act as immigration officials, resulting in racial profiling and a widespread fear of reporting crimes, which compromises community safety, yet law enforcement turns a blind eye to employer exploitation of immigrants.

These issues stem from underlying, global causes of migration, such as war, environmental exhaustion, poverty, and inequitable trade and development policies that are often ignored. This presents us with a noble challenge – to work together to address the underlying global causes of migration at the same time we improve the ways we answer the knock at our church doors.

Our calling to participate fully as people of faith in the democratic process is clear to us as Christians whenever concerns about morality, social justice and compassion meet at a crossroads with decision-making that may lead either to healing, or further fracturing of our society and the world. In this context the Church asserts its freedom and responsibility to express theological understandings about moral questions. At the center of our engagement of social questions is the Church's mandate to "proclaim, in word and deed, the good news of Jesus Christ in the midst of a fractured world."^{iv}

We admire the Christian witness that has been an inspiration to us and the world, yet also confess that the Church has not always lived up to its own principles. Too often we have heard a silence from the Church in debates having implications for human welfare and social and economic justice. We recall with regret past controversies in our society regarding war and peace, genocide, slavery, women's suffrage, workers' protections, civil and human rights, and economic and social injustice, where the Church has fallen short of its calling to preach, teach and be a blessing in the world. The Church's historic silences or complicity was not necessarily always deliberate; often it could be attributed to misinformation or ignorance, or to a focus on other pastoral concerns; but regardless, the silence is sin. Today (as in all other times) the Church is called to rise in unequivocal defense of the stranger, the sojourner, the widow and orphan, and our most vulnerable neighbors.

As we consider the causes and realities of human migration, we together affirm these shared religious convictions^v concerning God's creation and commandment to love one another:

- 1) God created human beings in God's image, and as such each person is a precious and sacred reflection of the Creator.^{vi}
- 2) The land on which we live is not ours, but God's. God made all of us stewards of creation, and called us to act with justice, mercy, and wisdom.
- 3) God's people are a pilgrim people. Throughout Biblical history, the people of God have been sojourners, refugees, and migrants. God protected them as they moved, multiplied, and maintained the earth. The Bible teaches us to defend, protect, and honor the rights and humanity of the sojourner, stranger, refugee, and immigrant.
- 4) Our sacred instructions to welcome the stranger remind us to show hospitality to immigrants.^{vii} God's Word reminds us of the rich blessings we receive from God and of our obligations to share these blessings.
- 5) The Church, when it welcomes the stranger, provides an uplifting moral and spiritual witness.^{viii}

While we respect and adhere to the laws of the U.S. Government, ultimate authority belongs only to God and not the State. As we seek to love our neighbors and welcome the stranger, we also seek laws that are humane and just, as are the laws of God. In light of the highest political ideals grounded in justice, equality and freedom:

- 1) We embrace the deeper theological conviction that we are not separate and distinct from other human beings, but are a part of the same interconnected, interdependent, human family. We reaffirm previous National Council of Churches USA policies that call on the United States to do its share to alleviate human suffering in other lands by admitting refugees and immigrants and providing sanctuary to persons needing to relocate.^{ix}

- 2) We acknowledge the ease with which we as human beings are prone to fear people who we consider “other”, yet, our faith challenges us to overcome such natural fear of those who are not like us. This fear of the “other” has had tragic consequences in the United State and the world. This nation fought with itself to overcome a legacy of slavery, struggled in every generation against racial, ethnic, gender, and religious discrimination, and today may again succumb to fear, xenophobia, and racist impulses directed against new immigrants.
- 3) We are reminded that the United States is a nation of immigrants and other displaced peoples, and has been so since its inception; this reality enriches our culture and strength as a country. And yet the immigration of immigrants and others in North America began a massive displacement of indigenous peoples with consequences that continue today.
- 4) We recognize that there is an urgent need for increased awareness about trafficking in human beings, and about the economic and sexual exploitation of migrants. We recognize the need for effective enforcement against human traffickers and smugglers, and the defense and protection of victims of such crimes.
- 5) We recognize that government may have legitimate, morally justifiable reasons for denying immigration to certain persons.
- 6) We recognize that as religious leaders and educators we play an important role in helping the public understand immigrants and immigration policy.

CONTEXT OF THIS RESOLUTION:

These concerns and understandings lead us to respond when we see human beings, made in God’s own image, driven from their homes by necessity, violence, poverty, hunger, political or religious oppression, and when migrating people find only more trouble and pain when they arrive at our doorstep.

As Christians we acknowledge and lift up the compassionate, committed, and creative ministry that goes on every day as the Church defends and protects migrants.^x We know of the energy and resources devoted by the Church to respond in loving and helpful ways to the needful knocks at the Church’s doors. The Church, working though Church World Service, the National Council of Churches USA, local and regional ecumenical bodies, member communions and congregations, continues to respond faithfully to a call to minister to immigrants and refugees, in the name of the One who came to bring healing to a broken world.

We understand our call to care for the most vulnerable among us, and in our current context, these most vulnerable include millions of undocumented neighbors who live and work in our midst. We also affirm the importance of family unity for citizens, visa holders, and documented and undocumented immigrants, as a priority throughout the U.S. immigration system. Our nation’s official treatment of immigrants continues to be a grave affront to the mandates of Christian faith, which does not abide bad treatment of the stranger, the visitor, or those who seek asylum from persecution.

Our faith-inspired legacy calls us to reexamine our immigration policies and services in light of the current situation, and to work for swift federal reform that is humane, just and sustainable.

CALL TO ACTION:

We call for moral leadership that stands firm in the conviction that our nation, consisting of diverse peoples, should remain deeply committed to struggle against racial, ethnic and religious discrimination. We see prejudice as a particularly dangerous and existential threat to our diverse nation, and to human life across the world. Therefore, we commit ourselves to strive together for a society that treats immigrants, who are being threatened in this time, as fully deserving of all the civil and human rights afforded by the U.S. Constitution and international agreements.

THEREFORE, TOGETHER:

We Resolve, as the National Council of Churches USA and Church World Service

To work collaboratively among Church World Service, regional and local ecumenical bodies, and the National Council of Churches in the USA's member communions through a new, "Ecumenical Task Group on Immigration," organized under the fiscal and administrative auspices of the National Council of Churches USA, and supported and jointly led by the National Council of Churches USA, Church World Service, and in leadership-partnership with regional and local ecumenical bodies. The task group's leadership will consist of representatives from participating institutions, but will be accountable to the Justice and Advocacy Commission of the National Council of Churches USA and to the Immigration and Refugee Program Committee of Church World Service, which will cooperatively oversee its progress and receive reports on its activities. The Task Group will preserve collaborative accountability to participating regional and local ecumenical bodies, church agencies, and Church World Service in order to assure effective coordination and resourcing of diverse efforts. The Ecumenical Task Group on Immigration will have an initial life of three years.

The Ecumenical Task Group on Immigration will have a mandate to:

- 1) Work to formulate a cohesive, coordinated, theologically-based response from the Christian perspective about issues surrounding immigrants and immigration, and to foster effective communication between our churches, in our communities, and with business, governmental, and international leaders.^{xi}
- 2) Collaborate to create, share and widely disseminate religious education curricula, videos and other media that focus on the biblical witness with respect to immigration, refugees, sojourners, and our obligations to the most vulnerable amongst us, particularly materials and best practices from the local and regional ecumenical organizations, which pioneer in appropriate responses at the local level.
- 3) Foster and share the means to teach about the sociological, economic, military, and legal forces affecting immigrants and immigration policies in the USA and the world, and the appropriate role of humanitarian and development aid.
- 4) Work with partners to support and resource sanctuary congregations and communions, providing information about current law and including the formation of strategies to raise broad awareness of sanctuary churches and the theological basis for their Christian activism.
- 5) Through the National Council of Churches and Church World Service, seek the financial support of charitable foundations and committed immigration-reform funding entities to support and extend the immigration reform efforts of the National Council of Churches USA, Church World Service, church agencies, and regional and local ecumenical bodies.
- 6) Encourage ways churches might engage immigration beyond charity and material support, to include public policy advocacy and engagement with public debates regarding legal and regulatory reform. Help to conceive, coordinate and/or resource public events that raise awareness about the faithful, Christian basis for policy engagement on immigration. Work to educate congregations and the public about specific public policy measures that defend the rights of immigrants and that call for more-humane immigration policies.

As such,

We call on President and Congress of the United States to:

- 1) Protect legally the unity of immigrant families by making family reunification a priority for both citizens and the immigration process, and by rejecting proposals that separate families, such as the denial of citizenship to children born in the United States and point systems that put family-based and employment-based immigration applicants in competition with each other.^{xii}
- 2) Facilitate generous laws enabling immigration by individuals who seek to work in the United States and their families; ensure full protection of their rights; and allow them to travel to their native countries and return to the United States as they wish, without unnecessary fees or lengthy waiting periods.
- 3) Adopt new immigration laws that include a humane and just process by which undocumented immigrants can earn their lawful permanent residency and eventually apply for citizenship.
- 4) Defend and extend internationally agreed-upon human rights to those who are persecuted by increasing assistance to displaced persons worldwide, welcoming more refugees and asylum seekers to the United

States, and robustly funding resettlement and integration, and other services for refugees, asylees, and other migrants.

- 5) Preserve and extend the domestic legal, civil, and human rights of immigrants, both children and adults, regardless of immigration status. These rights include fair wages, educational opportunities, access to social services, equitable treatment under U.S. law, and protections against worker exploitation and other forms of mistreatment.
- 6) Reform the visa system to increase the number of family-based and employment-based visas, efficiently process visas to reduce the backlog, and increase staff and resources to process applications in a timely manner.
- 7) End mass immigration raids on places of employment, as well as mass deportations, the deportation of lawful permanent residents, the forced separation of families, and government-sponsored border militarization and wall construction.
- 8) Implement equitable trade and development policies, including increased humanitarian assistance funding, that protect the way of life of persons who need to emigrate in order to survive; and recognize their international rights to emigrate or to remain in their native country in safe and humane conditions

We call on The Church

And most importantly, as brothers and sisters in faith, we call on fellow Christians in congregations, church agencies, and local and regional ecumenical bodies to:

- 1) Lead in prayer, teaching, and preaching about the biblical, spiritual and moral basis for compassionate hospitality toward immigrants.
- 2) Pray, study and search our hearts and minds with respect to our own attitudes and preconceptions regarding immigrant peoples, and, to provide opportunities for our churches and communities to confront the sins of racism, xenophobia, and ethnic or cultural prejudice against our fellow human beings.

ⁱ The 2007-2011 Strategic Plan of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America
All Bible references and quotes found in this resolution are from the New Revised Standard Version translation.

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ⁱⁱⁱ A compendium of policy documents, statements and resources can be accessed at: www.nccusa.org/immigration/

^{iv} "THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD", Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches, 2007

^v A compendium of biblical references that inform our theological basis for addressing immigration concerns can be found at: <http://www.nccusa.org/immigration/bible>. A compilation of statements and resources created by ecumenical bodies and member communions can be found at: <http://www.nccusa.org/immigration/>

^{vi} In Genesis 1:26, "*Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.*"

^{vii} Deuteronomy 10:19 states "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Hebrews 13:2 urges, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Paul reinforces this teaching in Romans 12:13, with, "Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers."

^{viii} In "THE CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the member communions stated, "We believe that through increased Christian concern in immigration, the churches and their members can make a fuller witness to our faith that, under God, men and nations are responsible to each other and for the welfare of all mankind."

^{ix} In "UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION POLICY" the member communions stated, "On the international level, we believe the United States for moral reasons, as well as in the interest of its own economic and political security, should remain steadfast in its purpose to cooperate with other nations in meeting the needs of displaced persons, refugees, and surplus populations."

^x Deuteronomy 10:19, "*You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*"

^{xi} In "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the Communions resolved: "We urge the churches and their members to make the most effective Christian witness they can on migration and related matters, in developing public opinion and in helping those in federal and state governments and intergovernmental agencies to shape migration policies, legislation and practices" Elsewhere in "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION" the Communions stated: "We urge increased attention by all people in local parishes, in councils of churches, and in the work of church men and women, to keep under constant study, and to make more alive in public concern, the laws which our Government has enacted or should enact to help meet the critical needs of mankind."

Also in CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION, the communions stated: "Study and concern should include not only migration matters, but all those undertakings through which our nation does and can lend material as well as moral assistance to other peoples for their economic and social progress."

^{xii} In "CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION, the churches called for replacement of a previous quota system with one that gave priorities to families seeking reunification. While those changes were made, present governmental proposals would eliminate the longstanding family-unity priority.