

General Board of Church and Society Statement In Support Of Comprehensive Immigration Reform in the United States

The General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church celebrates the movement for civil rights for the people who are undocumented. The mass numbers of people who have participated in marches throughout the United States in recent weeks have brought this issue to national prominence. This movement has seen undocumented migrants coming out of the shadows and urging the United States to recognize their human right to be treated with dignity. More than anyone else, most people who are undocumented do not want illegal immigration to continue. We stand with our undocumented brothers and sisters and ask that our broken immigration system be fixed.

While we recognize that the current state of immigration is complex, we believe that our calling as a people of God is to welcome the stranger and offer hospitality to the poor. This is a command that all who claim to be the people of God must follow. We also recognize that immigrants come from all over the world. Indeed, they are us and we are they.

We believe that justice is not achieved in Scripture through the exclusion of one group over another. Achieving biblical justice, even in complex issues with competing justice claims, demands that we welcome all people to the table and work to find room with adequate access to necessary resources.

Leviticus 19:33-34 (NCV) says, "Do not mistreat foreigners living in your land, but treat them just as you treat your own citizens. Love foreigners as you love yourselves, because you were foreigners one time in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." While written originally about the Israelites, the lessons of this passage remain vitally relevant to citizens in the United States today. In welcoming the stranger we recognize that many United States citizens were once immigrants. When offering hospitality we also acknowledge God's abiding concern for the sojourners of our world.

We are deeply concerned with the anti-immigrant legislation that passed the U.S. House of Representatives in December, 2005 (HR 4437). We are also concerned about the level of ire and anti-immigrant emotion that this debate has reached throughout the United States, especially among some members of the U.S. Congress and the media. We urge all people to act and dialogue responsibly and respectfully. We encourage the U.S. Congress and the Presidential Administration to enact comprehensive immigration reform that includes the following principles:

- Earned pathways to citizenship for all immigrants,
- Protecting the rights of workers through safe, orderly, and legal avenues to enter this country,
- Reuniting families separated by migration, and
- Effective and humanitarian border protection.

As we reflect on the Scriptures we see how immigrants have played a significant role in the redemptive narrative of God's people. Likewise, immigrants continue to play significant roles in

our churches, schools, and communities today. To care for the stranger, the foreigner, the sojourner, the documented and undocumented immigrant is to care for Jesus himself. HR 4437 criminalizes both the undocumented immigrant and those who serve the immigrant. Because of the injustice of U.S. Rep. James Sensenbrenner's bill, we are compelled by our faith to publicly state that if such a bill is passed into U.S. law we will have no other choice than to follow the commands of Jesus to minister to the stranger, and to obey our conscience and our Scriptures, even if that leads us to commit acts of civil disobedience.

We urge the U.S. Senate and House to act justly and pass comprehensive immigration reform.