

## COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE TO US IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION

The Church of the Nazarene in the US and Canada is increasingly becoming an international body. In addition, the growth in the six world regions and the flattening of our world make domestic immigration policies critically germane and relevant.

The *Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Act of 2005* (H.R. 4437) has unintended consequences and seeks to criminalize the undocumented person who lives and works in virtually every community, district, and neighborhood. One in twenty American workers is in the U.S. illegally. Adding wives, children and other family members, estimates for undocumented immigrants range between 9 and 11 million.

H.R. 4437 would make it a federal crime to offer services or assistance to undocumented immigrants. The Bill would broaden the immigrant-smuggling law so that people who assist or shield undocumented immigrants would be subject to prosecution. Furthermore, the legislation would make it a federal crime to live in the U.S. illegally, turning millions of undocumented immigrants into felons, ineligible to acquire legal status.

Obviously, most previous and current border control efforts to control undocumented immigration have failed miserably.

- Each year from 1990 to 2004 there were between 480,000 and 660,000 undocumented immigrants entering the U.S. In all, nearly 9 million undocumented immigrants arrived after 1990.
- Since the mid-1990s, the number of undocumented immigrants entering the country has been slightly larger than the number of immigrants coming legally.
- From 1995 through 2004, more than 2,640 migrants have died while attempting to cross the border. In the last four years there has been on average more than one death per day.

This reality poses both opportunities and responsibilities for Nazarenes in the U.S. Our faith calls us to evaluate the proposed legislation as to its effect on human life and the dignity of the human person. All policy decisions have human consequences and moral content; they help or hurt people, strengthen or weaken family life, advance or diminish the quality of justice in our land.

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We seek not to make some political or ideological point but to lift up the human and ethical dimensions of immigration policies, aspects too often neglected in public discussion. We bring to this task a dual heritage of Nazarene social teaching and traditional American values.

## **Biblical Perspectives**

- The fundamental conviction of our faith is that human life is fulfilled in the knowledge and love of the living God in communion with others.
- The ethic of welcoming the stranger and sojourner was woven into the very fabric of the Israelite confederacy (Exodus 23:9).
- The radical love of God is embodied by Jesus Christ in the story of the Good Samaritan, in which the love of God is expressed through the compassion of a stranger (Luke 10:33-34).
- We are called to make a fundamental “option for the poor.” These priorities are not policies; they are norms that should guide us in formulating and implementing policy.

WHEREAS, as of March 2004, only 30% of the undocumented population arrived in the U.S. after 2000 which means 70% of undocumented immigrants had been in the U.S. more than 4 years; and

WHEREAS, our Judeo-Christian commitment calls us to provide help and protection to sojourners living among us; and

WHEREAS, undocumented persons possess certain inalienable rights through the International Declaration on Human Rights and the Constitution of the United States Bill of Rights; and

WHEREAS, being an undocumented person is not a crime, and there is dire need for amnesty for the undocumented immigrants living in the U.S; and

WHEREAS, the majority of undocumented immigrants are married couples, many with children, and the employment rate is nearly 100%; and

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WHEREAS, we believe that successful, comprehensive immigration reform can be achieved by combining border-security controls and realistic workplace and earned-citizenship initiatives;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Church of the Nazarene *move to create a task force to be responsible for evaluating the results of current US immigration policies.*

In addition to the above initiative we urge Nazarenes:

1. to denounce and oppose the rise of insensitive reactions against undocumented immigrants, and to support any and all efforts to build bridges;
2. to provide pastoral care and crisis intervention to undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers;
3. to provide technical and financial assistance to local churches in compassionate ministry with undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers;
4. to monitor immigration policies and practices in order to ensure fair and adequate process in regard to asylum petitions, judicial review, refugee resettlement priorities, and immigrant categories;
5. to become more informed and active citizens, using their voices and votes to speak for the voiceless, to defend the poor and the vulnerable and to advance the common good.

We look forward to a fruitful exchange among differing viewpoints and pray that all will take to heart the urgency of our concerns; that together we will test our views by the Gospel and our denominational heritage; and that we will listen to other voices in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue.

Holiness must never be limited to the sanctuary or to the moments of private prayer. It is achieved in the midst of the world, in family, in community, in friendships, and in citizenship. Through their competency and by their activity, holiness persons have the vocation to bring the light of the Gospel to public policy, so that the world may be filled with the Spirit of Christ and may more effectively attain its destiny in justice, in love, and in peace.