

A Call to Become Immigrant and Refugee Welcoming as a Conference and in Congregations

A Resolution of Witness of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ April 2017

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Summary:

This resolution is based on the belief that every immigrant and refugee has inherent dignity and human rights. Every immigrant and refugee should be able live in safety, live without fear, and have access to basic necessities and opportunities.

Biblical and Theological Rationale:

The Hebrew Scriptures recount the history of a people on the move: the Israelites fleeing oppression in Egypt and wandering through the wilderness and desert in search of the Promised Land. The God who journeyed with them, gave the Israelites several instructions on how to treat the stranger—perhaps anticipating that once they attained safety and power, the Israelites would forget where they came from.

The Israelites are reminded, “When a stranger resides among you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. The stranger residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love the stranger as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Lev. 19:33-34).

The Hebrew Scriptures also contain guidance on the treatment of laborers including resident foreigners. In the Ten Commandments, the instruction to keep the Sabbath holy includes everyone: men and women, slaves, livestock and the alien resident shall all have a day to stop working and rest (Exodus 20:8-11). In Isaiah, we see God’s heart and vision of justice for the laboring and oppressed people declaring, “They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them” (Isaiah 65:21-23).

We are reminded that the three Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity share in common the sacred calling to welcome and care for our neighbors. The Qu’ran prompts, “do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbor from among your own people, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, the wayfarer, and your servant (Surah 4:36). We find that Jesus directly quoted the commandment in Hebrew Scriptures that “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31, Lev. 19:18).

As Christians, we strive to follow the teachings of Jesus whose love and leadership transcended and challenged the political, religious and social norms of his day. In the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus provides an uncomfortable and challenging explanation to the expert of the law's question, "And who is my neighbor?" This man doesn't get an easy answer to care for fellow Jewish neighbors in his vicinity who look, talk, think and live like him. Instead, he is told to emulate a Samaritan—someone from a cultural group that the Jews disdained and did not interact with—who not only provided first aid to a man beaten and left for dead, but also took him to an inn, saying he would pay for any medical treatment that was required. "Go and do likewise," Jesus tells him.

In light of current injustices carried out against immigrants and refugees, we also remember that as Christian community, we belong to the 'great cloud of witnesses' (Hebrews 12:1) of those who have gone before. The early apostles prayed for boldness and were arrested and persecuted because they were recognized as companions of Jesus (Acts 4-7). In what ways will we be recognized as companions of Jesus in our current day and age?

Resolution:

WHEREAS, we acknowledge and confess that U.S. foreign policy, militarism and the exploitation of natural resources have contributed to the global crisis of human migration, and that those of us in positions of power and privilege often benefit from the unjust treatment of immigrants; and

WHEREAS, many U.S. immigration policies have historically been and continue to be based in racism and xenophobia; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. maintains for-profit immigration detention centers with federally mandated bed quotas and directs billions of dollars to construct border walls and surveillance apparatus; and

WHEREAS, immigrants, their families and communities are detrimentally impacted by detention and deportation practices that cause separation, fear, trauma and financial hardship; and

WHEREAS, immigrant labor is a significant source of maintaining the U.S. food system and other essential infrastructure to keep our cities and towns running; and

WHEREAS, there has been an increase in hate crimes and targeting of immigrants and refugees; and

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ declares, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here;" and

WHEREAS, the UCC National Collaborative on Immigration has issued a call to action, "God Loves Beyond Borders" and set forth "Strategic Areas of Focus" to help the UCC be a prophetic voice through priorities to humanize the immigrant in the U.S. and to advocate for the protection and human rights of all immigrants and refugees; and

WHEREAS, we as Christian community strive to ground ourselves in accompaniment values that remind us to humble ourselves and follow the leadership of immigrants and refugees;

NOW THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Pacific Northwest Conference (PNC) of the United Church of Christ declare itself an “Immigrant and Refugee Welcoming Conference;” and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Annual Meeting of the PNC call upon the conference, congregations, and the people of the PNC to offer a counter-narrative of humble hospitality, radical inclusivity, and courageous resistance as a direct response to unjust and dehumanizing immigration policies, practices, and rhetoric; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that given the current political reality of Executive Orders calling for increased and widespread immigration enforcement that are causing heightened fear in immigrant and refugee communities, the Annual Meeting of the PNC call upon and encourage the conference, its congregations, and the people of the PNC to:

Designate funding to support immigrant-led community preparedness workshops and know-your rights trainings; and

Designate funding for legal defense funds for immigrant families affected by raids, detention and deportation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the people of the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ ~~will~~ are encouraged to:

1. Educate ourselves on issues affecting immigrants and refugees and deepen our analysis and understanding on the intersectionality of justice issues through the creation of and participation in faith-and-justice groups in our congregations;
2. Encourage our members, pastors, and conference leadership to include immigrant and refugee rights in their faith formation and education opportunities and in their advocacy work;
3. Discern opportunities for action through relationships with immigrant-led groups, organizations and coalitions that takes into consideration a congregation’s assets and geographic location that could include among many possibilities:
 - a. Volunteer and financially support immigrant and refugee organizations that work in the congregation’s locale;
 - b. Provide direct services such as housing, food assistance, language assistance and companionship during periods of difficulty or adjustment to life in a new country;
 - c. Build cross-cultural friendships and relationships of mutual accompaniment;

- d. Advocate with elected officials through partnering with advocacy groups, letter writing, phone calling, and in-person lobbying to protect the rights of immigrants and refugees at local, state and national levels;
 - e. Organize rapid response teams who could mobilize requested assistance in case of raids or other crisis situations;
 - f. Offer Sanctuary for those fighting deportation or who fear harm;
 - g. Participate in vigils, direct actions and advocacy at the Northwest Detention Center or at other sites of injustice;
 - h. Participate in rallies and marches to publically stand with immigrants and refugees and protest unjust laws and actions; and
4. Encourage the collaboration of PNC congregations and members through channels such as the Justice & Witness Ministries Committee and website, sharing stories in the conference newsletter, monthly packet and other means of communication; and
 5. Make educational material readily available online including the UCC toolkit, “Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation: The Journey Is Made by Walking” and the Church Council of Greater Seattle’s “Upholding Sanctuary in the Faith Community 2017;” and
 6. Encourage the PNC delegates to consider supporting the 2017 General Synod “Immigrant Welcoming Resolution,” and;
 7. Report back to the Annual Meeting in 2018 on progress of this resolution over the next year