

# Preaching God's Heart for Immigrants & Refugees ...

**Reaching the Nations in North America**

With contributions from,

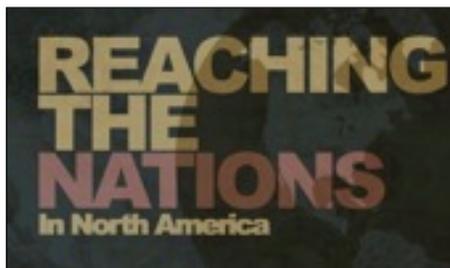
- ❖ Dr. Miguel Ecchevarria, Director of Hispanic Leadership Development, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Greek, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
- ❖ Keelan Cook, Sr. Church Consultant, Union Baptist Association (Houston, TX)
- ❖ Jonathan Akin, Director of Young Leader Engagement, NAMB, Former Pastor, Fairview Church, Lebanon, TN
- ❖ Alan Cross, Missional Strategist, Montgomery (AL) Baptist Association
- ❖ SBC Resolutions on Immigrant and Refugee Ministry, 2011 and 2015



# Reaching the Nations in North America

The nations have come to North America. That is the reality that we live in. How is the church in America responding? How are Southern Baptists responding to this incredible opportunity before us to reach the nations of the world with the gospel - right here in our backyard? According to US Census reports, the United States is home to over 80 million first and second generation immigrants. That means that one out of four people in our nation are either an immigrant or the child of an immigrant. Since 2000, almost half of first generation immigrant growth has occurred in the US South, where Southern Baptists have a large majority of our churches. Do we see the people that God is sending to us? Many of them are already Christians. Are our churches receiving these brothers and sisters in Christ from other lands? Globally, we are facing the largest refugee crisis in modern history with approximately 65 million displaced people. How will we respond?

While many immigrants and refugees are part of the global church, many are not yet Christians and have never encountered the gospel through the ministry of an evangelical church. Do we see them? Are we taking Christ to them? Are we receiving them and loving them sacrificially? Could it be that the very revival that we've prayed for for decades could be upon us in the arrival of people from other countries who have come here for various reasons? What if we made it our mandate to love, minister to, and serve every immigrant and refugee who moved into our communities with the love and gospel of Jesus Christ? What if every church truly functioned as an embassy of Heaven and actively sought ways to pivot toward the immigrants in our midst and shine the light of the gospel and God's love on them?



This little resource is meant to provoke your thinking and your heart to engage God's heart for immigrants, refugees, migrants, and the millions of people moving from place to place around the world. It is easy, and perhaps natural to see the arrival of newcomers as something to fear. But, what if we see this as an opportunity for God to work in people's lives, for our churches to engage in cross-cultural missions right in our own towns, and for the future of the church in America to be changed? In the following pages, Dr. Miguel Ecchevaria of Southeastern Seminary, Keelan Cook, and Jonathan Akin will explore these questions theologically, missiologically, and ecclesiologically. At the end, check the statements that Southern Baptists have already made on Immigrant/Refugee ministry in our resolutions of 2011 and 2016.

**~ Alan Cross, Missional Strategist, Montgomery (AL) Baptist Association**

# Theology: A Biblical Perspective on Immigration

**Dr. Miguel Ecchevaria, Assistant Professor of New Testament and Greek,  
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary**

A person with minimal access to social media and cable news can affirm that immigration is a contentious topic of discussion. Our news outlets dedicate considerable time to reporting about sanctuary cities, building a wall, and deportations. Each source provides their own polarized perspective on immigration, often vilifying anyone who disagrees. Lost in the hostility are the objects of these discussions—people we call foreigners, immigrants, or illegals, human beings created in God’s image, most of whom are not gun totting, drug smuggling criminals, just people trying to support their families.

In light of our toxic news culture, how should Christians think about immigration? Should we let our nationalistic identity or our political parties drive our view of the stranger? Neither of these should be our first option. We should first look to the Bible. I am not arguing that we should not be proud to be Americans and or that we should not support political parties. What I am contending is that we have a duty to honor Jesus over a flag or a donkey or an elephant.

In this essay, I will show that God’s people have historically been called *immigrants* who are themselves to show compassion to the stranger in their midst. I will make this point by examining the theme of immigration in the OT. Then, I will examine this theme in the NT, focusing on 1 Peter. Lastly, I will address 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7, two passages that are often used as open-and-shut cases against caring for immigrants.

## Old Testament

In the Genesis narrative, God makes a covenant with a pagan named Abraham (Gen 12, 15), promising him land, offspring, and blessing. Of these promises, the former sets Abraham and his descendants, such as Isaac (Gen 35, 37) and Jacob (Gen 28, 32), on a migration to the promised land. Along the way, his descendants become slaves in Egypt for 400/430 years (Exod 1-14). To put it lightly, they were poorly treated immigrants. Yet, hardship was part of God’s plan for Israel. When God makes a covenant with Abraham, he foreknows their time in Egypt, assuring Abraham that his offspring would be aliens—unwelcomed and detestable ones at that—in a foreign land (Gen 15:13). The status of immigrant would be a common one for Israel in the OT, so much so that the biblical authors frequently use the word *gare* to refer to God’s people. Most translations render this term as sojourner, stranger, or alien. The translation *immigrant*, though, more precisely communicates the reality of the Old Covenant community, as they wander from one place to the next (Gen 15:13).

After being delivered from Egypt, the Israelites resume their migration. As they are sojourning, God gives his people the law (Exod 20), within which God displays his love and concern for the immigrant. As such, the Israelites were required to treat foreigners with love and kindness, contrary to the way they were treated in Egypt (Exod 22:21; Deut 23:7). The law did not stipulate qualifications for such treatment, such as a green card or work visa. Generally speaking, they were to love and care for the immigrant, as they would other vulnerable persons, such as the fatherless and the widow (Deut 10:18). Moreover, the law extended to strangers the same social protections as native Israelites (Lev 19:34). They were entitled, for example, to fair treatment as laborers (Deut 24:14) and rest from work on the Sabbath (Exod 20:10). Of course, the history of Israel underscores that Israel did not heed the law, for they wronged, abused, and mistreated the immigrant. The prophets raged against Israel’s treatment of the foreigner (Ezek 22:7-9; Mal 3:5). Israel’s flagrant abuse of the immigrant was one of the major reasons why they were eventually sent into exile.

While Christians may not be the nation of Israel, loving the immigrant is a principal that applies to all believers. We see this clearly as both Leviticus 19 and Matthew 22 exhort love of neighbor. And, to be perfectly clear, an undocumented person *is* your neighbor. With this in mind, what if Christians treated the immigrant as a

neighbor? Would that not lead to a more empathetic view of this vulnerable people group? Would that not lead to more gospel fruit among sojourners, viewing them as persons in need of redemption, or fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, rather than nuisances and threats?

As I have mentioned, the Israelites did not love the stranger. Thus, God sent them into exile, centuries after entering the land. Once again, the Israelites became immigrants under the rule of foreign nations such as Babylon and Assyria. While some scholars argue that they returned to the land in Ezra, chapter 9 clearly affirms that God's people were slaves under a foreign ruler. They, therefore, longed for the day when they would be home. The return they expected was not to one strip of territory (i.e., Canaan); it was eschatological, that is, they expected to inherit a reconstituted earth, a new creation (Ps 2; Ezek 36-37; Isaiah 65-66). The OT ends with this very good expectation, anticipating the day when God's people would no longer be immigrants.

The NT authors would have had this OT story in mind as they wrote their letters—a story that reaches its climax and culmination in Jesus the Messiah, who will deliver his people from exile and into a new earth. Of these authors, Peter's first epistle is especially relevant for a discussion of immigration, for he takes the label *immigrant* and applies it to dispersed Christians throughout the Roman Empire.

### 1 Peter

Peter wastes no time in alerting his readers to their present reality, calling them *elect immigrants* (1:1). Later, he calls them immigrants and sojourners (2:11). These terms are often used to refer to someone who is living in a foreign land, either by force or by their own volition. Peter uses them to underscore that Christians are living as immigrants in the present world, awaiting entrance into the place where their citizenship truly lies (1:4; 2 Pet 3). Rome is not their home. They are citizens of an eschatological world where Jesus is king. Thus, they are a strange people, for their allegiance to Jesus necessitates that they abstain from the sinful behavior of the citizens of the present world (1 Pet 4:4), making them subject to persecution (1 Pet 4:12).

On a macro level, the hope of scattered Jewish exiles in the prophetic corpus is the same as new covenant believers. That is, they are exiles in the present cosmos awaiting the inheritance of a new creation (Isa 65-66; Rev 21-22). This is the story of God's multiethnic people who will be saved through Messiah Jesus. Thus, an overarching view of the canon makes clear that God's people have historically been strangers. Paul even takes the vocabulary of sojourner and stranger and applies it to the former life of gentiles (all non-ethnic Jews), before becoming citizens of the household of God (Eph 2:19).

What does this all mean for present day Christians? I will be blunt: We are immigrants—you and me, all of us. Though we may feel very comfortable in the United States, this is not our home. Our primary citizenship is not associated with our present geographical borders. The NT underscores that the present status of *all* Christians—regardless of socioeconomic status, color of skin, or legal standing—is one of *immigrant*. We are a peculiar people, citizens of a land with a distinct set of values and commitments from the one in which we presently live.

Peter's letter should, therefore, raise some questions about the way we think about immigration. Do we primarily see ourselves as immigrants in the present world? Or, do we mainly think of ourselves as citizens of our present nation, prioritizing our citizenship in America over our citizenship in heaven? Do we realize that we have more in common with Christian immigrants from Syria or Mexico—regardless of legal status—than with unbelieving Americans or secular members of our respective political parties? In view of scripture, I argue that our primary allegiance should be to a kingdom that has yet to be fully realized, one that comprises people from all nationalities, at the head of which is a once-crucified-now-glorified Jewish man, over our loyalty to America.

But, there are important questions that I have not yet addressed. Do we not have laws? Are we not called to obey such laws regarding immigration? Are we supposed to care and love a person who may be here illegally, even if he is a brother in Christ? First Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7 are two passages that Christians use as open-and-shut cases for obeying immigration laws and denying help to the sojourner. I will now take brief look at these texts.

## **1 Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7**

In the very letter in which he calls Christians strangers and immigrants, Peter also calls believers to be subject to governing authorities (1 Pet 2:13-17). Contrary to what some may assume, Peter is not exhorting Christians to blindly obey the government—for governments may call citizens to obey sinful demands. Tom Schreiner insightfully argues:

[Christians] obey the injunctions of governing authorities ultimately because of their reverence and submission for the Lord. We have an implication here that ruling authorities should be resisted if commands were issued that violated the Lord's will. It is impossible to imagine that one would obey commands that contravened God's dictates "for the Lord's sake."

I heartily agree with Schreiner's reading of 1 Peter 2:13-17. Consequently, Christians only submit to laws that agree with, and not do not conflict with, God's will in the Bible. We can also read similarly Paul's parallel exhortation to submit to God ordained authorities (Rom 13:1-7). Such human authorities are fallible and can err. We, therefore, have a duty to examine laws in light of Scripture, before yielding to a government's demands. Blind obedience is never an option.

Historically, Christians have not followed governments into sin. Just think of the last couple of centuries. Have Christians not resisted, and even protested, submission to laws regarding slavery and segregation? Have Christians not actively campaigned against laws regarding abortion and same sex marriage? Consequently, then, do we not also have a duty to examine immigration laws in view of Scripture? If we have never thought of doing so, have we just assumed that our immigration laws are just? An examination of American history will eliminate that presupposition.

At the very least, we should consider whether our immigration laws are in line with how God calls his people to treat the sojourner. We need, as M. Daniel Carrol R. proposes, "Discerning submission, not blind obedience"—for 1 Peter 2:13-17 and Romans 13:1-7 are not calls to follow governments blindly, nor are they open-and-shut cases against immigration. As with all things, we must allow our minds to be renewed by God's word, not by someone yelling at a political convention, or some polarized news source.

### **Conclusion**

In this short essay, I have provided an overview of what the Bible says about immigration. Throughout its narrative, God's one multiethnic people have been described as immigrants seeking a restored homeland. This diverse group finds their unity in their allegiance to Messiah, not in their present geographical boundaries. In other words, our allegiance to Christ takes precedence over our allegiance to the United States. And when the latter conflicts with the former, we have a duty to dissent peaceably. I have argued that this also applies to the government's policies on immigration.

I would like, then, to reiterate a key point: The United States of America is not our home. We, along with people from every tribe and tongue, are immigrants, strangers seeking a restored inheritance. That is one of the reasons why we are to love the stranger, for he may be a fellow Christian, sojourning to the same eternal destination. So, we actually have more in common with an undocumented Christian (as a fellow believer) than with our American friend who shares the same political ideology but sleeps in on Sundays. Even if an immigrant is not a Christian, we are still called to love and care for him. Perhaps God might be so kind as to use our witness to win him over to Christ. Is that not more important than preserving our way of life? Is that not more important than spending time and energy on keeping out criminals (who are a small percentage of those trying to enter the country)? If we gave priority to the Bible, and not an elephant or a donkey, would we not spend less time talking about building a wall and more time building bridges to care for the immigrant?

1 HALOT, 201, notes that the word *gare* is used 92 times and often refers to “a man who (alone with his family) leaves a village and tribe because of war...famine...epidemic, blood guilt etc. and seeks shelter in residence at another place, where his right of landed property, marriage and taking part in jurisdiction, cult and war has been curtailed.”

2 Tim Keller argues for this in his *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes US Just* (New York: Riverhead, 2010).

3 LSJ, 1337, translates *παρεπίδημος* as one “sojourning in a strange place.” BDAG, 775, renders the word similarly and notes that “the author of 1 Pt makes an intimate connection between the status of the addressees (as virtual visitors in the world because of their special relation to God through Jesus Christ) and their moral responsibility.” Rather than “sojourner,” in 1 Peter 1:1 I have chosen to translate *παρεπίδημος* as “immigrant,” for it accurately communicates the status of his audience, in that they are “immigrants” in this strange world, migrating to the future world promised to them.

4 Thomas Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, vol. 37 (Nashville: Holman, 2003), 128.

5 M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos, 2013), 125.

## **Missiology: Missions is changing, and we need to keep up: Practical steps to gospel ministry with internationals**

**By: Keelan Cook, Sr. Church Consultant, Union Baptist Association (Houston, TX)**

Missions is changing.

Our great-grandchildren will read about this moment in church history textbooks, if the Lord does not return first. Global changes are taking place that will forever affect the way churches fulfill the great commission, and our generation is standing at a major turning point in the history of the church.

I like to call this change the *democratization of global missions*. That is a fancy way of saying that for the first time in history, every member of your local church can be directly involved in international missions. I am not referring to praying for missionaries or giving to support their cause. These crucial tasks have always been available to church members, and they are perhaps more important than ever. But now, every member can actually participate in cross-cultural ministry.

Let me explain.

### **Major shifts in global missions**

**Two hundred years ago**, the church saw the beginning of what we call the modern missions movement. Men like William Carey and Adoniram Judson would pack up their belongings, in a casket nonetheless, and travel across the ocean by ship for months to reach lost peoples in foreign lands. These were one-way trips. They made the journey to serve and ultimately die there. Great costs and sacrifice accompanied the select few that churches were able to send.

**Sixty years ago**, another shift occurred that was perhaps as significant as the first. As airplanes became a common and inexpensive mode of transportation, it no longer took two months to get to the nations. Now the trip would only take two days. Not only did this allow churches to send many more long-term workers, but it also meant churches could send a team of people to support the work of their long-term missionaries.

**Today**, a similar change is happening. No longer are the nations two months, or even two days away. Now, they are moving in across the street. At one time, our only hope of reaching the

nations was sending a select few across the water to live in far away lands. Eventually, we could support these people with teams from our churches. This involved many more church members. But now, the day has come when every member of a local church can be involved in international missions. Not only can we go to the nations, but the nations are coming us.

### **How do we respond?**

**We do not stop sending internationally.** Yes, there are literally millions of international immigrants in the US (over 42 million, to give a number), and many of the world's unreached people groups are now represented in communities across the United States. However, we must not back down from sending international missionaries. In fact, we are not sending enough. While there are unprecedented local opportunities now, any work in the US must be a supplement to engagement where the vast majority of the unreached still live.

**We do need to seize this new day in missions.** For the first time since the modern missions movement began, global migration patterns are providing a completely new point of access to the unreached world. That access point is your own backyard. With unreached people groups moving to the US by the thousands, global missions is now democratized and it can (and should) be an every-member ministry in your local church.

This means educating people in local congregations, partnering with other churches in your area, and finding and engaging the groups that God has placed around in your community. Imagine the picture of the global church that can exist in your community if your church works with other churches to plant more churches, all speaking different languages, worshipping in different cultures, and reaching out to the full spectrum of peoples that now call your community home.

### **“How do we find them?”**

That is the first question people ask. It appears to be the overwhelming misconception that it takes someone with a degree in anthropology or a background in ethnographic research to map out a city's people group populations. Many local church leaders and lay people feel completely unqualified to do the work of cross-cultural ministry. Perhaps this attitude stems from a “professional missionary” culture in our churches. Whatever the case, I assure you this is far from true.

With that said, I humbly submit a different way. Instead of creating systems that require professionalized ministry, we must rely on methods that allow anyone with a basic understanding of the task to be practitioners in the mission.

Concerning such a method, this should get you started:

### **Start with Narrative Mapping**

If our task begins with finding international communities, then our first step is narrative mapping. Unlike scouring census data and using some kind of algorithm to extrapolate a population, narrative mapping is simply learning to read the community like a narrative. **Narrative Mapping is a**

**method by which you are able to *understand and enter the community*.** Every place has a history, a geography, and people who live there. Good ministry can only occur if you enter into that world. Furthermore, narrative mapping allows you to engage with people in such a way that you gain a picture of the community. It is walking into new places and asking the right questions. In fact, narrative mapping is a process of discovery that any church member can do. It is as easy as looking for places where you will find internationals like an Ethiopian restaurant, a West African market, a Hindu temple, or a Persian eyebrow threading shop.

Narrative mapping is, in many ways, being a good listener; however, it is listening for the right things. There are three things that you should be listening for as you ask questions at ethnic establishments:

1. **Where are they from?** This needs to include country of origin and language spoken in the home.
2. **Where are they now?** Answers questions like where they live, work, shop, play, & worship.
3. **Are there any people of influence in the community?** These people are gatekeepers to the community. If you know him (or her), he will be able to tell you everything about that community and may invite you into it. In their home country this person would be the chief of the village or neighborhood. Here he takes the form of a president of their association, a religious leader, community developer, or something of that nature.

This may sound daunting, but it is actually really simple. The key to narrative mapping (or simply discovery) is keeping your eyes peeled for new places, restaurants, shops, or other establishment and finding out who works and shops there. By identifying these places in your community, you are introduced to different social circles that exist in the same community as you. In many ways, this is simply doing the same things you would normally do (buying gas, getting groceries, going out to eat) in different places.

### **Reading the Bible as Evangelism**

As you meet internationals, invite them to study the Bible with you. Unfortunately, asking unbelievers to study the Bible is not too common in North America anymore. Perhaps it is because we have become accustomed to using presentations and other means to share the gospel. Maybe it is because we assume most Americans have a general understanding of the Bible, since it was a formative part of the worldview a few generations ago. Possibly it is a lack of biblical literacy on the part of the believers. Whatever the case, I am convinced it rarely crosses the mind of Christians in the West to use study of the Bible itself as a means of sharing the gospel.

And that is too bad. The Bible, after all, is the way we know the gospel in the first place. It is the revealed source of the good news. It tells a magnificent story, from cover to cover, that confronts every living, breathing human being and compels them to faith and repentance. We need to reclaim the practice of studying the Bible with unbelievers. In “missionary speak” these are often called discovery Bible studies, because they allow someone who is not a Christian to discover the story and truths of Scripture in a way that calls them to faith in the gospel. I love that idea, and it is founded upon the practice of Bible study as evangelism.

**So, here is your challenge:**

This week, find one place that appears to be an international establishment and go shop there. If it is a restaurant, go try their food. If it is a market, just walk in and start looking around and asking questions about what you see. Meet people, make friends, ask some good questions, and invite them to read stories with you from the Bible that explain the good news of Christ's salvation.

## **Ecclesiology: Preaching on God's Heart for Immigrants and Refugees in the Local Church**

**Jonathan Akin, Director of Young Leader Engagement, NAMB, Former Pastor, Fairview Church, Lebanon, TN**

In the Fall of 2016 during the height of the Presidential election season, Jonathan Akin preached a message in his church about God's heart for the immigrant and refugee. The following are notes from an interview that was conducted with him after his message. He said that the message went well overall, but it was one of the most controversial messages he has preached. The numbers of people who disagreed with him were high and he had to answer lots of clarifying questions with conversations.

Jonathan: "I was really clear in my message - I don't think the Bible mandates one policy over another. America is not Israel. There are principles about how God views foreigners and that should affect us, but we should be charitable to one another."

"In the nature of this election, I think its becoming increasingly important in how we engage in the political process. We need a biblical approach to faith informing how we vote. I did a series called "Decision 2016" where we talked about the most pressing issues. Immigration was one of those issues where there has been a lot of fear and misinformation. I've tried to give the church a biblical framework in how to cast a vote. Immigration is a key issue that needed to be addressed. We then had a Q&A for the end of the service - questions about security, about refugees coming through the process, and how terrorists trying to come through the refugee resettlement process would find that to be the worst way to come into America. Let's make decisions based on facts, not falsehoods."

"Leviticus 19:33-34 was the main text. The central concern of Leviticus is how can a holy God live among a sinful people? The sacrificial system which prepares the priesthood is established and then we see the holiness code. How do redeemed people live in the world? The primary command of Lev. 18-20 is you don't live like the pagans among you. In chapter 19, holiness looks like loving your neighbor as you love yourself. Matt. 25 says you feed, clothe, serve, provide for your neighbor. The root of this is a gospel root - for you WERE a sojourner. You were sojourners in a foreign land and God rescued you out of this. You know what it is like to be a sojourner and you know what it is like to be rescued. I cross referenced this with Deuteronomy 26 and the bringing of the tithe - "Our father was a wandering Aramean." God has saved me and now I must treat others with kindness as well.

"I made specific applications to the political process with 3 points: 1) Bible doesn't mandate a specific immigration policy. America is not Israel. 2) But, there are principles - the Government has responsibility to promote good and restrain evil. Role of government is to protect citizenry, but treating the sojourners with love/compassion is a mandate. We cannot support politicians who would dehumanize sojourners/immigrants and treat them in ways that are less than how God would treat them. If we only care about ourselves, then we are not the greatest nation on the planet. If we don't care about the least of these, then what happened to our greatness? 3) The church's role - there are ways we have helped and we can continue to help. Fairview is working with the IMB to reach the Kurds in Nashville. Between 20k-30k Kurds live here, which is the largest population of Kurds outside of Kurdistan. We've been working with them to help them and care for them, including partnering with the Kurdish mosque in relief work for the Kurds. We work with BGR to go into Kurdish camps and share the gospel in Kurdish areas of Iraq and Turkey and we are seeing Kurds come to Christ. We overcome our fear of Muslims by talking to them and getting to know them.

I asked Jonathan, "What role can the church play in shaping public policy on this issue?" His answer was multifaceted:

1. Speak the truth. There is a lot of disinformation that Christians both accept and pass on to others. We don't need to let our fear drive the way that we look at this situation.
2. Humanize/Personalize this. These aren't numbers, these are people who are hurting and need help and care. This can drive us to compassion. In Matthew 9 when Jesus saw the crowds, he was moved to compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd.
3. Contact our representatives and try to influence them in a Biblical way to be compassionate to immigrants. God is concerned with the least of these and that is what is best for us as a nation as well. We should express to our leaders that what is best for America is that we treat the foreigner well. We should recognize that government has an important role to play in protecting our citizens, so there needs to be vetting and security and whatever pathway is put in place for legalization is thorough to protect the citizenry. We need to use wisdom in this.
4. Participate in sponsoring opportunities where you are paired with immigrant/refugee families through groups like World Relief. Helping them become part of American life where they can participate is important. One of the main roles of the king in the Old Testament is to stand up for those who cannot stand for themselves. It is not to denigrate those who are hurting and suffering. It is to protect the vulnerable. The ideal king is someone who is upholding justice for all people.

# On Refugee Ministry

St. Louis, MO - 2016

WHEREAS, The world is facing the largest refugee crisis since World War II, with over sixty million people displaced throughout the world and considered refugees; and

WHEREAS, War, violence, genocide, religious persecution, and other forms of oppression have contributed to massive people movements across the globe, as millions flee for their lives; and

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have a long record of caring for and ministering to refugees throughout our history; and

WHEREAS, This history of refugee ministry includes the sponsoring of almost 15,000 refugees from 1975–1985, resulting in the starting of 281 ethnic churches and a 1985 resolution commemorating this decade of ministry; and

WHEREAS, There are expected to be 85,000 refugees coming into the United States in 2016 from four continents and the Caribbean; and

WHEREAS, Scripture calls for and expects God's people to minister to the sojourner ([Exodus 22:21–24](#); [Exodus 23:9–12](#); [Leviticus 19:33–34](#); [Deuteronomy 10:17–22](#); [Deuteronomy 24:17–22](#); [Deuteronomy 26:5–13](#); [Psalm 146:8–9](#); [Matthew 25:35–40](#)); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, June 14–15, 2016, encourage Southern Baptists to minister care, compassion, and the Gospel to refugees who come to the United States; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage Southern Baptist churches and families to welcome and adopt refugees into their churches and homes as a means to demonstrate to the nations that our God longs for every tribe, tongue, and nation to be welcomed at His throne ([Revelation 5:9](#); [Revelation 7:9–12](#); [Psalms 68:5](#); [James 1:27](#); [Leviticus 25:35](#); [Leviticus 19: 33–34](#)); and be it further

RESOLVED, That we call on the governing authorities to implement the strictest security measures possible in the refugee screening and selection process, guarding against anyone intent on doing harm; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we affirm that refugees are people loved by God, made in His image, and that Christian love should be extended to them as special objects of God's mercy in a world that has displaced them from their homelands.

# On Immigration And The Gospel

## Phoenix, AZ - 2011

WHEREAS, The Kingdom of God is made up of persons from every tribe, tongue, nation, and language ([Revelation 7:9](#)); and

WHEREAS, Our ancestors in the faith were sojourners and aliens in the land of Egypt ([Exodus 1:1-14](#); [1 Chronicles 16:19](#); [Acts 7:6](#)); and

WHEREAS, Our Lord Jesus Christ lived His childhood years as an immigrant and refugee ([Matthew 2:13-23](#)); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures call us, in imitation of God Himself, to show compassion and justice for the sojourner and alien among us ([Exodus 22:21](#); [Deuteronomy 10:18-19](#); [Psalm 94:6](#); [Jeremiah 7:6](#); [Ezekiel 22:29](#); [Zechariah 7:10](#)); and

WHEREAS, The Great Commission compels us to take the gospel to the nations ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)), and the Great Commandment compels us to love our neighbor as self ([Mark 12:30-31](#)); and

WHEREAS, The gospel tells us that our response to the most vulnerable among us is a response to Jesus Himself ([Matthew 25:40](#)); and

WHEREAS, The Bible denounces the exploitation of workers and the mistreatment of the poor ([Isaiah 3:15](#); [Amos 4:1](#); [James 5:4](#)); and

WHEREAS, The United States of America is increasingly diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, and culture; and

WHEREAS, Approximately 12 to 15 million undocumented immigrants live and work within our borders; and

WHEREAS, The relative invisibility of the immigrant population can lead to detrimental consequences in terms of health, education, and well-being, especially of children; and

WHEREAS, Recognizing that [Romans 13:1-7](#) teaches us that the rule of law is an indispensable part of civil society and that Christians are under biblical mandate to respect the divinely-ordained institution of government and its just laws, that government has a duty to fulfill its ordained mandate, and that Christians have a right to expect the government to fulfill its ordained mandate to enforce those laws; and

WHEREAS, The governing authorities of a nation have the right and responsibility to maintain borders to protect the security of their citizens; and

WHEREAS, Undocumented immigrants are in violation of the law of the land; and

WHEREAS, Many of these persons, desiring a better future for themselves and their families, are fleeing brutal economic and political situations; and

WHEREAS, The issue of immigration has prompted often-rancorous debate in the American public square; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, June 14-15, 2011, call on our churches to be the presence of Christ, in both proclamation and ministry, to all persons, regardless of country of origin or immigration status; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we declare that any form of nativism, mistreatment, or exploitation is inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we deplore any bigotry or harassment against any persons, regardless of their country of origin or legal status; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we ask our governing authorities to prioritize efforts to secure the borders and to hold businesses accountable for hiring practices as they relate to immigration status; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we ask our governing authorities to implement, with the borders secured, a just and compassionate path to legal status, with appropriate restitutionary measures, for those undocumented immigrants already living in our country; and be it further

RESOLVED, That this resolution is not to be construed as support for amnesty for any undocumented immigrant; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we pray for our churches to demonstrate the reconciliation of the Kingdom both in the verbal witness of our gospel and in the visible makeup of our congregations; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we affirm that while Southern Baptists, like other Americans, might disagree on how to achieve just and humane public policy objectives related to immigration, we agree that, when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to His church, the message, in every language and to every person, is "Whosoever will may come."