



Presbyterian Policy on Immigration

The 217th General Assembly (2006)
on Advocacy and Welcome
for All Immigrants

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The Presbyterian General Assemblies began to speak out on immigration and refugee issues when the aftermath of World War II and the partitioning of Europe displaced millions of people. This led to the 1953 PC(USA) Assembly to call for a comprehensive review of the nation's immigration policies. In 1954 the PC(USA) Assembly called for legislation to provide for needs of migrant workers who had lived and worked in the United States throughout the war, often replacing workers who were fighting and therefore unable to farm or work in manufacturing.

In subsequent years the Assemblies spoke to the problems of refugees arriving in the US from all over the world. The 1980 UPCUSA and 1982 PCUS Assemblies issued general statements on the world refugee situation and expressed support for actions in what was called the "sanctuary movement", when thousands of Central American refugees poured into the United States fleeing from repression and human rights violations. Mexican migration continued to go unaddressed by the government and in 1981 a PC(USA) joint statement with PCUS stated "Mexican immigrants reveal again our divided mind about immigration. They are told they are needed and at the same time that they are not wanted. They are regarded both as burden and benefit. Political and geographical boundaries are in and of themselves part of the human social existence... However, the only boundaries Christians recognize ultimately are those established by justice and love."

The 206th PC(USA) General Assembly (1994) adopted the "Call to Presbyterians to Recommit to Work and Pray for a Just and Compassionate U.S. Immigration Policy". Again, in 1999 and 2004 Presbyterians, through General Assembly actions, guided by theological and ethical principals, continued to call for a commitment from both Presbyterians and the government to work toward welcoming immigrants into our communities and providing just laws that effect those who live and work in the United States. The need for immigration reform continues today. In 2006, the PC(USA) General Assembly again echoed what has been expressed for the last 50 years. To find out more about immigration and what is happening currently in the church go to www.pcusa.org/immigration.

1. Reaffirm the 216th General Assembly (2004)'s "Resolution Calling for a Comprehensive Legalization Program for Immigrants Living and Working in the U.S."
2. Affirm that our denomination, mindful of the current realities and threats to our belief system, not sway from our solidarity with, and pledge of service to, all of our brothers and sisters regardless of their race, creed, color, nationality, or resi-

- dency status.
3. Affirm those Presbyterian congregations and presbyteries that are already standing alongside immigrants and are actively engaged in acts of compassion, empowerment, and advocacy.
 4. Challenge each Presbyterian congregation and presbytery to embrace a comprehensive approach to “advocacy and welcome” for immigrants that includes, at the very minimum:
 - a. an opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria, and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
 - b. reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited;
 - c. the creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected; and
 - d. border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy.
 - e. a call for living wages and safe working conditions for workers of United States-owned companies in other countries;
 - f. a call for greater economic development in poor countries to decrease the economic desperation, which forces the division of families and migration.
 5. Affirm the right of each congregation, presbytery, and our denomination as a whole, to speak out clearly and constantly to the media and others regarding the PC(USA)’s call to serve all those in need and to stand with the oppressed, our refusal to be deferred from this mandate, and our willingness to break laws that forbid us to live out our responsibilities to God and to our brothers and sisters who do not have U.S. residency documents.
 6. Encourage legislators serving in the House and Senate to actively work across party lines to achieve legislation that is consistent with the principles stated in Recommendation 4 above.
 7. Affirm the PC(USA)’s commitment to providing sanctuary to anyone in need of safe space, food, or shelter.
 8. Advocate these positions through the Washington Office of the PC(USA) and the Office of the Stated Clerk, including amicus curiae briefs, if necessary.
 9. Direct the General Assembly Council, through its National Ministries Division, to create and facilitate a network of “immigrant welcome” churches that agree with the affirmations of this overture.
 10. Reaffirm that we must find ways to ensure that “marginalized persons” in our society, citizen or not, are not pitted against each other.
 11. Express our grave concern about the negative impact of the growing effort to make the border more secure through building walls designed to move migrant patterns further into the more dangerous part of the borderlands, by increasing the number of federal agents, and by deploying armed National Guard to the already volatile region.
 12. Commend the visionary efforts of programs such as Just Coffee, Just Trade Centers, and micro-credit programs that strengthens communities and enables people to stay in their homeland through economic development.
 13. Urge presbyteries to develop and implement strategies, policies, and protocols:
 - a. to educate their congregations and membership with regard to ministries with immigrant peoples consistent with Item 10-05 (‘Resolution Calling for a Comprehensive Legalization Program for Immigrants Living and Working in the United States’) approved by the 216th General Assembly (2004), ministries with
 - i. undocumented people,
 - ii. asylum seekers,
 - iii. women and children trafficked into the U.S.A.,
 - iv. immigration detainees, and
 - v. documented people with immigration issues;
 - b. to empower those ministries at a local and presbytery-wide level;
 - c. to encourage and support immigrant communities to organize on their own behalf relative to the list of issues in Recommendation 13.a. above.