

# WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

July 15, 2009

This week's messages are---

- Contact Congress Now: Refugee program funding crisis
- Mark 2: 15-17 - Jesus includes everyone at table

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## Contact Congress Now: Refugee Program Funding Crisis

Congress and the President are now in the process of determining how many refugees will be allowed to come to the United States next year and how much funding will be available for refugee assistance in this country and overseas. The determining factor is the amount of money Congress and the administration provide through the annual Appropriations process for key refugee accounts. Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is deeply concerned that insufficient funds may be made available, resulting in cuts in refugee admissions, services and overseas protection.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) account---part of the Labor/HHS Appropriations bill---provides funding to assist refugees and other special populations in obtaining economic and social self-sufficiency in the United States. ORR oversees several programs, including the matching grant program, which assist refugees integrating in the United States; provide aid to victims of torture and trafficking; and help care for and place unaccompanied alien children in appropriate settings.

On Friday, the House Appropriations' Health and Human Services Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) recommended that ORR be funded at \$715 million for Fiscal Year 2010 (FY10). This is significantly LESS THAN President Obama's request of \$741 million for ORR.

The cut in funding is particularly concerning due to ORR's expanded mandate to provide services to Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) recipients who face persecution due to their service with the U.S. government, as well as an increased number of unaccompanied alien children. ORR requires a robust increase in funds to help these SIV recipients, refugees, and other vulnerable populations secure housing and employment so they can gain self-sufficiency and truly begin their new lives in the United States. The expansion of populations served and a higher rate of trauma from torture and trafficking in admitted refugees highlight that a one percent increase in funding for ORR simply is not enough to ensure that refugees for whom the United States has taken the responsibility are appropriately provided assistance.

BY 9AM THIS FRIDAY, the full House Appropriations Committee will decide how much to appropriate for ORR. This is our last chance to influence the House bill. Then the Senate will also give its input, before they come together for the final decision.

Please CALL or email your Representatives TODAY demanding that ORR be funded AT LEAST at President Obama's requested level of \$741 million.

### Sample email

[Your address]

[Date]

The Honorable [senator's/representative's full name]  
U.S. Senate/U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

I write to ask you to do everything you can to protect U.S. refugee resettlement and overseas refugee assistance. Please also support the President's funding request for \$741 million for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the fiscal year 2010 Labor/HHS Appropriations bill.

The United States, historically the world leader in refugee aid, must not back away from its commitment to refugees worldwide who flee oppression and persecution. At a time when humanitarian needs around the world are increasing, the United States should not cut its funding for these vital refugee accounts.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Respectfully yours,

[Your signature]

[Your printed name]

### General Assembly Guidance

Previous General Assemblies have spoken to the problems facing Indochinese, El Salvadoran, Haitian, Afghan, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Ethiopian refugees. The continuing 20th century phenomena of refugees seeking security and safety from political and economic oppression moved the 1980 UPCUSA and 1982 PCUS Assemblies to issue general statements on the world refugee situation.

An enduring issue for American Christians is posed by Mexican migration to the United States. The UPCUSA and PCUS Assemblies jointly adopted the policy statement

"Mexican Migration to the United States: Challenge to Christian Witness and National Policy" in response to the problem and urged specific action to make real the "love for neighbor" that Christians are called to express in relations with all people. Two sentences from that policy statement characterize the best in Presbyterian thinking on the subject of immigration: "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" (UPCUSA, 1981, p. 257; PCUS, 1981, p. 426).

In 1980, the General Assembly of the UPCUSA asked that Congress appropriate adequate funding for internal refugee resettlement.

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### **Mark 2: 15-17 - Jesus Includes Everyone at Table**

And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax-collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples---for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax-collectors, they said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' When Jesus heard this, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'

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Thank You.

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