



Issue Paper

The United Methodist Church and Immigration

Official Position of the 2004 Book of Discipline

¶163.IV.F Migrant Workers. Migratory and other farm workers, who have long been a special concern of the church's ministry, are by the nature of their way of life excluded from many of the economic and social benefits enjoyed by other workers. Many of the migrant laborers' situations are aggravated because they are racial and ethnic persons who have been oppressed with numerous other inequities within the society. We advocate for the rights of all migrants and applaud their efforts toward responsible self-organization and self-determination. We call upon governments and all employers to ensure for migratory workers the same economical, and social benefits enjoyed by other citizens. We call upon our churches to seek to develop programs of service to such migrant people who come within their parish and support their efforts to organize for collective bargaining.

Resolutions From the 2004 Book of Resolutions

The 1996 General Conference approved a rule stating: "Resolutions shall be considered official expressions of The United Methodist Church for 12 years following their adoption, after which time they shall be deemed to have expired unless readopted." (The Book of Discipline 1996,

¶ 510.2" While these resolutions are not considered "church law" they do reflect the sense of the General conference on a number of social issues.

¶164. This resolution, titled "Love for The Sojourner," calls on the United Methodist Church and other groups to urge the United States Government as well as all governments to take certain steps regarding refugee and immigration issues. The resolution emphasizes the need for international labor policies that "promote sustainable development," that provide employment for all persons, "thereby reducing migration pressures. It also urges the United States Government to eliminate within the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Control, and the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigrant Services of the Department of Homeland Security "all abuses of civil and human rights, including such practices as the violation of due process, denial of bond, detention of noncriminal asylum seekers, and hasty deportation of people who are undocumented or over stayed." The resolution also calls for the protection of basic human rights of immigrants and refugees, "such as the right to an education, adequate health care, due process and redress of law, protection against social and economic exploitation, the right to a cultural and social identity, and access to the social and economic life of the nation whether in documented or undocumented status."

Why This Is an Issue

Migratory and other farm workers have long been a special concern of the church because they are excluded from many of the economic and social benefits enjoyed by other workers. The Social Principles of the church have contained a statement about migratory workers for almost 40 years. This is not a new issue for United Methodist. It is an issue, however, that has become a powerful and divisive since September 11, 2001 and in the run up to this year's presidential campaigns. The presence of volunteer "Militias" along the border between Mexico and the United States, have highlighted the potential for abuse and violence in those areas. There appears to be a split between those who favor "Border Security" above all else and those who favor comprehensive immigration reform that allows for a "path to

citizenship” for those who are undocumented.

Part of the United Methodist response to this issue is the General Board of Global Ministries program “justice for Our Neighbors.” Begun in 1999 as a response to increasingly complex immigration stemming from the far-reaching immigration law of 1996, this program provides participating congregations with the resources needed to start immigration clinics to serve their communities. The General Board has funded such clinics in both the Central Texas and North Texas conferences.

The Issue Before the 2008 General Conference

Conferences and caucuses will ask the conference to address concerns of immigrants that have emerged in the past four years. Some will ask for additional measure to protect borders while others will seek justice for people trying to escape poverty.

The Board of Global Ministries has submitted a petition titled “Immigration: A Quest for Justice.” This petition seeks to dispel myths about immigrants, offers a brief synopsis of United States immigration history, spells out necessary policy changes to reform the system, and provides biblical principles that underlie the call to welcome the stranger and engage in the mission of advocacy on behalf of migrants. Jim Winkler, executive of the Board of Church and Society, outlined five elements for a comprehensive immigration reform:

- A path to citizenship—an earned legalization program that is workable and achievable.
- Firm, fair enforcement of the law that is consistent with humanitarian values and treats all people with dignity and respect.
- Restoration of due process protections for immigrants removed the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.
- Family based immigration freeform that reduces waiting times for family reunification.
- A plan for the future flow of migrants that includes workplace protections and examines the root causes of migration.

