

Immigration Paper

Grace and Peace to you all, Sisters and Brothers of the Presbyterian Church (USA):

The Challenge Before Us:

Immigration questions increasingly impact Presbyterian congregations and ministries throughout our country, that are :

- coping with rising anti-immigrant sentiment fostered by media and political campaigns ,
- dealing with consequences of federal border-enforcement strategy,
- finding that common services provided by our congregations' ministries – shelter, food programs, access to health services, counseling, transportation – are being declared illegal by anti-immigrant legislation in the states,
- affecting pastors struggling to support sundered families whose lives are being torn apart by inconsistent immigration enforcement policy,
- impacting Presbyterians who are immigrants or people of color who are now afraid to live, or even to travel, in states that have targeted immigrants with punitive legislation.

Our church's own experience of the growing immigration crisis suggests that we need an intentional, faithful discussion that spans regions and crosses state and presbytery lines, so that we might respond with a more unified ministry and witness. This communication aims to start that conversation, and to ask you for an action-step of submitting an overture or resolution by the Assembly deadline, which may vary depending on the implications of the overture. That is, if the overture has financial implications for current or future budgets, it must be submitted by the 60 day deadline, May 1, 2012. If it has neither constitutional implications (does not seek to amend the constitution) nor financial implications for current or future budgets, it must be submitted by the 45-day deadline, May 16, 2012.

Why It Matters:

At stake are – the lives of brothers and sisters who sojourn among us, the reclaiming of space to practice our faith in the public square, and the living out of some very classic and historic Presbyterian virtues.

- **Biblical mandate** : hospitality is a thread that runs through the whole of Scripture – from Abraham entertaining angels unaware, to Ruth gleaning the fields, to Jesus welcoming the “little ones”, to the Apostle Paul's mission among the Gentiles. In this matter we are instructed by Exodus 22:21, “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt,” and Leviticus 24:22, “You shall have one manner of law among you, the same for the alien and the citizen.”
- **Providence and Promise** : Presbyterians know that God is the giver of all good things, and the One whom the faithful have trusted for a promised land, for peace, for justice and for abundant life. Immigrants who risk all to come here, pursuing a dream that may give their families a future, are living out a story consonant with our own history and dreams.
- **Hard work** : when we encounter people who most of all want honest labor and for that wish are imprisoned, who are targeted and scapegoated for our own society's shortcomings, who are already victims of global economic policies and trade agreements that have forced their immigrant status – when this is the case, how can Presbyterians avoid our own hard work of “the promotion of social righteousness” and the “shelter of the children of God”?

- **Justice and the Magistrate** : Presbyterians are enjoined to speak truth to power when the policies and practices of civil rule become unjust or ill-advised as they work against the common good, when policy does not deter immigration but does drive immigrants into the life-threatening desert, when farmers and small businesses suffer criminal charges for trying to employ the best and hardest workers, and when already-burdened law-enforcement is tasked with tasks unrelated to the public safety.

ACTION STEP

- A) We ask every presbytery to submit some resolution or an overture (based on its own experience and stories): to declare what witness it hopes for from our General Assembly, by way of a commitment of funds or other resources; to call our congregations, members, presbyteries and synods to faithful response and to make declaration to our governments (local, state and national).

Such an initiation of overtures will begin the sustained, faithful discussion, across state and presbytery lines, which we need. Multiple overtures and resolutions from diverse viewpoints will necessitate a committee at the next General Assembly created to address only Immigration Concerns so that those concerns will receive the attention they warrant.

- B) We ask Presbyterians to acts in ways such as:

- members teaching children in after-school programs in their congregations
- lawyers providing pro bono assistance to detainees
- persons visiting congregations with immigrant members to learn, gather and share those stories
- congregations making use of resources available through the PC(USA) Office of Immigration or the Washington Office
- Presbyterians everywhere getting to know their immigrant neighbors.

Grace and Peace,

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