

A Pastoral Letter from the House of Bishops

Phoenix, Arizona, September 21, 2010

There shall be for you and the resident alien a single statute, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you and the alien shall be alike before the Lord. You and the alien who resides with you shall have the same law and the same ordinance (Numbers 15:15-16).

So [Christ] came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:17-19).

Dear People of God,

Throughout our meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, we have reflected on the immigration crisis facing our host state, the United States, and all nations globally. A number of us visited the United States-Mexico border and saw first hand the many troubling and complex issues that face migrants, immigrants, the border patrol, local ranchers, and Christian communities seeking to minister to all of these groups. We are also mindful that similar border issues confront other nations represented in The Episcopal Church, especially countries in Europe, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and Colombia and Ecuador.

Holy Scripture teaches us that all human beings are made in the image of God, and that Jesus Christ gave his life for all people. Furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments declare the importance of hospitality to resident alien and strangers, a hospitality that rests on our common humanity. All human beings are therefore deserving of dignity and respect, as we affirm in our Baptismal Covenant (Book of Common Prayer, p.305). So our gracious welcome of immigrants, documented or undocumented, is a reflection of God's grace poured out on us and on all. In this light:

(1) Ours is a migratory world in which many people move across borders to escape poverty, hunger, injustice and violence. We categorically reject efforts to criminalize undocumented migrants and immigrants, and deplore the separation of families and the unnecessary incarceration of undocumented workers. Since, as we are convinced, it is natural to seek gainful employment to sustain oneself and one's family, we cannot agree that the efforts of undocumented workers to feed and shelter their households through honest labor are criminal.

(2) We profess that inhumane policies directed against undocumented persons (raids, separation of families, denial of health services) are intolerable on religious and humanitarian grounds, as is attested by the consensus of a wide range of religious bodies on this matter.

(3) We call on the government of the United States and all governments to create fair and humane immigration policies that honor the dignity of people on all sides of this issue. In the United States, we seek a reasonable path to citizenship for undocumented workers; a plan to reunite families; and a viable system for receiving temporary or seasonal guest-workers, with clearly identified points of entry. These measures would free the United States border patrol to

concentrate its efforts on the apprehension of drug traffickers, terrorists, and other criminals, and not on ordinary people who are simply seeking a better life for themselves and their children.

(4) We acknowledge the duty of governments to protect their people, including the securing of borders. The church has always respected this duty, which is grounded in government's God-given duty to protect innocent people and punish wrongdoers (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

(5) We recognize that racism and bigotry impact debates over migration and immigration. The Episcopal Church is committed to the eradication of all forms of racism, and decries the use of racial profiling in the arrest of persons suspected of being undocumented.

(6) We confess our own complicit sinfulness as people who benefit from the labor of undocumented workers without recognizing our responsibility to them. We passively tolerate an economic and political system that accepts this labor from millions of undocumented workers, and which has received approximately \$520 billion in social security revenue from them-- revenue from which they will never benefit. Yet at the same time we treat them as a threat.

(7) We do not discount the concerns of our fellow citizens regarding the danger uncontrolled immigration poses to our safety and economic well-being. We insist, however, that these concerns be approached within the broader context of a national commitment and covenant to inclusion and fellowship across all lines for the sake of the common good.

(8) We take seriously our commitment to and responsibility for our fellow citizens, as we strive to face the spiritual, moral and economic challenges of life in all sixteen nations represented in The Episcopal Church. We call on our fellow citizens to remember that the good of a nation lies beyond its own self-interest, toward a vision of a humanity restored in Jesus Christ, for in him "you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13).

(9) We offer for additional study a theological resource, "The Nation and the Common Good: Reflections on Immigration Reform."
God's grace be with us all.