

Welcoming the Stranger

Summary of the Pastoral Letter on Immigration

To be posted or read in the Churches of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Dear People of God in the Diocese of Maryland,

As our nation continues its troubled and hesitant course toward addressing issues of immigration, we have prepared a pastoral letter that can be used as a teaching document in our churches, to remind all of us of the biblical values and imperatives that should guide our treatment of newcomers and sojourners.

A world in which, increasingly, people move across national borders can be unsettling. The economic and political issues that surround the immigration debate are complex, and there are legitimate disagreements on how to resolve these issues. Emotions can run high during the course of our national debate on the need for reforming our immigration system. As Christians, however, we are to be guided in our conduct by the principles of love and reconciliation, and thus are to comport ourselves in all conversations with civility and genuine openness to hear and learn from the experience of others who may disagree with us.

As to how to respond to immigrants, whether documented or undocumented, our Christian faith tells us that we must treat those who come seeking work and survival not with hostility or slogans, but with minds that seek God's will and hearts that are open with compassion. All of us are children of God, made in God's image and blessed by God's unending love. In a world on the move, we need to learn - as people in every age have been forced to learn - to welcome the stranger, to embrace the "other."

All of us are descended from immigrants, and all of us benefit from the work of other immigrants in our communities. In all likelihood, each one of us encounters immigrants every week, if not every day, of our lives: teachers in our schools and colleges; doctors and nurses in hospitals; care-givers in nursing homes and daycare centers; business owners, mechanics, engineers, bank employees, sales clerks, custodians, cab and bus drivers. Interestingly, we find that antipathy toward our immigrant sisters and brothers often disappears completely when we encounter individual migrants in our own lives. How can we not appreciate the person who cares for our elderly parent, the volunteer

teacher's aide who helps our child in school, the fellow parishioner who gives such loving service to church and community?

Scripture teaches us that all human beings are made in the image of God and that Jesus Christ gave his life for all people. All human beings are therefore worthy of respect. Furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments declare the importance of hospitality to strangers, a hospitality that rests on our common humanity and not on whatever characteristics may separate us from one another. Our gracious welcome of strangers is a reflection of God's grace poured out on us and on all.

The moral principles of our faith lead us to value every individual, to value family ties and seek to preserve families, and to cry out for justice for all people.

In light of those principles and in the spirit of brotherly love that Our Lord teaches, we, your bishops, commend to all the churches of the diocese the full pastoral letter to be studied, discussed, pondered, and prayed about, so that we all may contribute appropriately to our national debate on issues of immigration.



The Right Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton
Bishop Diocesan



The Right Rev. John L. Rabb
Bishop Suffragan



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Minds to think, hearts to love, hands to serve

4 East University Parkway
Baltimore, MD 21218
410-467-1399
www.episcopalmaryland.org