

No. 0128
(Emergency Sense-of-the-Assembly)

**CALLING FOR THE SUPPORT OF HUMANE BORDERS AND THE CHANGE OF
UNITED STATES/MEXICO BORDER POLICIES**

Summary

For most of the last 100 years, people have passed back and forth across the United States-Mexico border with relative ease to visit family, to purchase goods and to work. In recent years U.S. Administrations have fostered the perceptions that by controlling our borders we could slow the drug traffic, we could control low paying labor on both sides of the border, and we could stop the use of health and humane services by migrants. For the last 9 years the Southwest Border Initiative has been focused on restricting movement through populated areas. This U.S Border Policy has been successful in reducing the migrant travel through the urban corridors but it has been unsuccessful in reducing the number of migrants entering the United States. In 2000, more than 375 migrants died passing through the deserts so they could work in U.S. factories and fields. As of June 2001 the number of migrant deaths have been much higher than in the previous 3 years, sadly climaxing in May with 14 migrants dying in one group in the Arizona Desert.

On Pentecost 2000 a group of concerned clergy and lay leaders as well as other non-profit organizations gathered to organize and present an alternative voice to the border discussion. From that gathering Humane Borders emerged. Humane Borders mission statement declares "Humane Borders, motivated by faith, will work to create a just and humane border environment. Members will respond with humanitarian assistance to those who are risking their lives and safety crossing the United States Border with Mexico. We will encourage the creation of public policies toward a humane, non-militarized border with legalized work opportunities for migrants in the U.S and legitimate economic opportunities for migrants in the U.S and legitimate economic opportunities in migrants' countries of origin. We welcome all persons of good faith." One of the primary projects Humane Borders started was the deployment of water stations in the desert along the commonly walked migrants paths, which has received national and international media attention.

Biblical and Theological Rationale

Both the Old and the New Testaments are filled with stories of migrants who crossed borders to save or better their lives. Abraham and Sarah crossed into Egypt to reside as aliens, and Joseph pleaded with the Pharaoh to let his ancestors stay in Goshen. Moses led his people out of Egypt to the Promised Land; even Mary and Joseph crossed over into Egypt for a while to avoid Herod and the potential death of their Child. In Exodus 23:9 we are told, "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt." And in Leviticus 19:33-34 we hear, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him/her. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him/her as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt." And in Ephesians 2:19 Paul tells us, "Consequently you are no

longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."

If the United States is truly going to be a nation under God it is imperative that we treat all God's people, especially the migrants (aliens) with hospitality and love. It is essential that we develop a US Border Policy that is humane and does not put desperate people on a death track as they seek to survive.

For all these reasons it is urgent that our denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and all of their local congregations be in conversation about border issues and border policies because what happens on our borders affects us all and should reflect our deepest faith. When we reach out to the migrant we are reaching out to our ancestors in faith while we extend a hand to the prophets of the future.

WHEREAS, our Bible gives a clear description of how we are to greet, treat and embrace the alien, migrant and neighbor in our midst; and

WHEREAS, the number of migrants dying as they cross into the United States is at an all time high and needs an emergency response from our church and all sectors of our society; and

WHEREAS, Humane Borders has been systematically applying to federal, state, tribal, county, and private land managers to deploy water in the desert and received its first federal permit to deploy water in March 2001; and

WHEREAS, following at least 17 deaths in one twenty-four hour period (May 23-24, 2001) federal, state, county, and private land managers are now calling upon Humane Borders to install and maintain water stations on their property; and

WHEREAS, Humane Borders has received full endorsement and \$25,000 in financial support from the Pima County Board of Supervisors, is in receipt of financial support from members of the Tucson City Council, and is being logistically supported by other municipalities; and

WHEREAS, Humane Borders institutional membership now extends from Los Angeles to El Paso and includes congregations in Mexico; and

WHEREAS, Humane Borders is the largest U.S. faith based organization capable of providing humanitarian assistance and substantive policy change; and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through its Week of Compassion offering has supported Humane Borders and its efforts to minister to the migrants;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting July 13-17, 2001, in Kansas City, Missouri, endorses the efforts of Humane Borders in providing humanitarian assistance to migrants and seeking positive change in our U.S. Border Policies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that individuals, congregations and denominational organizations be encouraged to share the joys and cost of supporting this lifesaving ministry through contributions, membership and communications; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service be advised that our Assembly objects to policies that systematically endanger migrants; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the governments of the United States and Mexico be urged to effect policy changes to reduce the number of migrant deaths.