

**GA-1723
(SENSE OF THE ASSEMBLY)**

ON BECOMING IMMIGRANT WELCOMING CONGREGATIONS

WHEREAS, the Bible instructs, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34 NRSV); and

WHEREAS, Jesus commands us to welcome the stranger, for “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40 NRSV); and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recognizes that it was founded partly by immigrant ministers, such as Thomas and Alexander Campbell; and

WHEREAS, immigrants are pastors, congregation members, and leaders in our church and denomination; and

WHEREAS, in these uncertain times of unprecedented negative rhetoric against immigrant groups and with changes in immigration policies, our congregations and pastors have heard the cries of affected communities many of whom are fearful of detention, deportation, and the ultimate separation of families and who are concerned about their families and family members who are already residing in detention centers; and

WHEREAS, the United States immigrant population stood at more than 42.4 million, or 13.3 percent of the total U.S. population, in 2014¹ and immigrants in the United States and their U.S.-born children now number approximately 81 million people, or 26 percent of the overall population of the United States²; and

WHEREAS, according to the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration, an estimated 11.4 million undocumented immigrants resided in the United States as of January 2012. Between 2009 and 2013, it is estimated that 4 million unauthorized immigrants (39 percent of the overall unauthorized population aged 15 and older) resided with children under the age of 18. Of this group, about 3.3 million (84 percent) resided with at least one U.S. citizen child under the age of 18, and 16 percent resided with non-U.S.-citizen children³; and

¹ In 2014, around 47 percent of immigrants (20 million) were naturalized U.S. citizens. The remaining 53 percent (22.4 million) included lawful permanent residents, undocumented immigrants, and legal residents on temporary visas (such as students and temporary workers)

² <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>

³ Id.

WHEREAS, it is estimated that in the 2009-13 period, 5.1 million children under the age of 18 lived with an undocumented immigrant parent, representing 7 percent of the U.S. child population. About 79 percent (4.1 million) of these children were U.S. citizens, and another 19 percent (959,000) were permanent residents and those with temporary visas⁴; and⁵

WHEREAS, there were between 35,000 and 120,000 undocumented immigrants in Canada as of May 2013⁶; and

WHEREAS, it was estimated that somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 undocumented migrants resided in Greater Toronto area alone, and that the number was expected to surge in 2015 when four-year work permits for thousands of temporary foreign workers who had moved to Canada began to expire under a 2011 law, potentially moving thousands more “underground”⁷; and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada has historically fought for social justice and has advocated in favor of the poor, dispossessed, and marginalized; and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is committed to serving all of God’s people; and recognizes all persons are created by and valuable in the eyes of God;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that in this prophetic and historic moment, the 2017 General Assembly, meeting July 8-12, 2017, in Indianapolis, Indiana, encourages the church to deepen its commitment to building unity and integration among all our Disciples congregations by issuing a call to congregations to become “immigrant welcoming congregations;” and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada and their respective Disciples ministries consider:

- (1) engaging in congregational prayer, listening conferences, and action around immigration policies;

4 Id.

5 The U.S. Supreme Court’s 4-4 split decision on June 23, 2016, effectively blocked President Obama’s executive actions on immigration that sought to expand Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and created Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA), thereby resulting in adverse effect upon thousands of families residing in the United States. *United States v. Texas*, No. 15-674.

6 As reported by the Toronto Sun, <https://www.reference.com/government-politics/happens-illegal-immigrants-canada-107f166da99ce7e4>

7 As reported by the Toronto Star newspaper reported August 20, 2013, https://www.thestar.com/news/immigration/2013/08/20/undocumented_immigrants_toronto_may_be_a_sanctuary_city_but_agencies_still_ask_about_status.html

- (2) offering mental health training and resources to immigrants and immigrant families, and to those from communities providing support and solidarity to these immigrants and immigrant families, such as clergy and other leaders;
- (3) supporting immigrant families when facing and experiencing separation; and
- (4) promoting ministries of healing for trauma resulting from immigration travel and trafficking⁸; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada and their respective Disciples ministries consider:

- (1) establishing preventive measures that help immigrant families and individuals avoid fraud and obtain credible legal resources and guidance;
- (2) offering planning and resource materials for individuals and families in the face of detention and deportation risks; and
- (3) offering support for those immigrants and families living in border communities and beyond; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that churches of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada seek to:

- (1) build solidarity between immigrant and non-immigrant congregations;
- (2) consider becoming or assisting congregations offering sanctuary protections to immigrants;
- (3) develop community protection and response models for families facing separation due to detention or deportation;
- (4) educate themselves and others about those immigration policies that support the rights of immigrant families;
- (5) offer support for current Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, border communities, and victims of hate crimes, fraudulent activity, and sex trafficking; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that congregations, ministries, organizations, and institutions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will continue to strive to respect and affirm the dignity of every child of God and to advocate for the fair and just treatment of immigrants and immigrant families in the United States and Canada.

Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries (Obra Hispana)
 Refugee and Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel
 Iglesia Alas de Salvación, Chandler, AZ
 Iglesia Cristiana Emmanuel, San Benito, TX
 The National Benevolent Association (NBA)
 National Convocation
 North American Pacific/Asian Disciples (NAPAD)

⁸ According to the Pew Research Center, “The Obama administration deported 414,481 unauthorized immigrants in fiscal year 2014...” <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/31/u-s-immigrant-deportations-declined-in-2014-but-remain-near-record-high/>

Background Information

References / resource links for drafting assistance:

Previous Disciples statements/resolutions:

<https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/missions-advocacy/refugee-immigration-ministries/about/disciples-statements/>

UCC Immigrant Welcoming Congregations Initiative:

<http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/Becoming%20an%20immigrant%20welcoming%20congregation%20updated%20Nov%20201%202012.pdf>

UCC's historical resolutions related to immigrants, including their most recent resolution passed in 2013: http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration_resolutions

**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
APPROVE GA-1723. (Discussion time: 24 minutes)**