

Faith Groups and Immigration

The following consists of statements on immigration from a sample of religious groups. The excerpts were taken from information provided by the Interfaith Worker Justice organization, unless otherwise noted. This information can be found on their website.

http://www.iwj.org/pdf/faith_groups_say_imm.pdf

American Baptist Church

Because of the Biblical mandate that we be a caring community, that we love our neighbors, that we establish justice and proclaim liberty; because we have a sense of Christian responsibility to serve human needs; because of our commitment to respect the human rights of all people; and because we are mainly a nation of immigrants, we, the American Baptist Churches USA, shall:

1. Continue our historical role as an advocate of human rights for immigrants, refugees and migrants.
2. Continue our historical role in resettlement of refugees and immigrants.
3. Continue to cooperate with Church World Service and other religious/volunteer/community agencies in the servicing and resettlement of refugees.
4. Continue to raise the consciousness of the Church and society regarding the needs of refugees, their contribution to American society and the Biblical trust that we are all God's children.
5. Engage in wholistic ministry to immigrants, refugees, migrants, and overstayed and undocumented persons in Immigration and Naturalization Service detention facilities and refugee camps in the United States and in local communities, offering assistance...

For Christians, the only humane and sustainable immigration and refugee policy for the United States must be one that reflects humanitarian values, responds to the needs of people within and outside of our own nation alike, and recognizes the importance of trade and foreign assistance policies for developing countries if internal pressures for emigration are to be reduced.

-excerpted from the "American Baptist Policy on Immigration and Refugee Policy"

The Episcopal Church

Congress is now considering legislation to respond to thousands who seek to enter the United States to improve their lives and the lives of their families, as well as those several million workers who remain in our country without legal status. As Christians, we are called to remember the Gospel mandate to extend hospitality to the stranger. As Episcopalians, we embrace a baptismal covenant which requires that we seek and serve Christ in all persons. It is primarily for these reasons that we ask the Senate to press for a just and humane immigration system and reject those measures now before it that are essentially punitive and impractical.

The Episcopal Church has adopted the following principles that we think should guide the Senate's action on immigration legislation:

- permit the orderly entry of legal workers to the US to respond to recognized labor force needs,

- ensure that close family members be allowed to enter or be reunited with individuals legally entering the US to accept employment,
- permit undocumented migrants residing in the US at the time the enactment of legislation to pursue legal residence and eventual citizenship if they are employed or responding to an offer of employment,
- ensure that migrants working legally in the US be granted the rights and benefits accorded US workers, including the right to change employment.

-excerpted from "A Statement from the Presiding Bishop"
 The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold
 March 27, 2006

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

St. Paul calls on us to "[W]elcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God" (Romans 15:7). Our Lutheran tradition calls on us to uphold the Biblical mandate to welcome the stranger. The Bible teaches us "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 (Leviticus 19: 33-34)." In Matthew 25, Jesus himself identified with aliens: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

We therefore request the following specific changes in legislation currently under consideration:

- Oppose the criminalization of the church, its ministers and its members who provide humanitarian aid to undocumented immigrants.
- Oppose provisions which criminalize undocumented presence.
- Provide a path to permanence for individuals currently residing and working in the United States as well as their families.
- Ensure basic constitutional due process rights in the enforcement of our laws.
- Include in the legislation the bipartisan "Agricultural Job Opportunities Act" for farm workers.

-excerpted from the Statement of Mark S. Hanson, Presiding Bishop, and Ralston H. Deffenbaugh, Jr., President

Islam

The Muslim Public Affairs Council as well as the Council on American-Islamic Relations - Los Angeles (CAIR-LA), the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California, the L.A. Latino Muslim Association, the Muslim American Society - Los Angeles, and the Muslim Students Association - West (MSA West) joined millions calling for comprehensive immigration reform in at least a dozen cities across the country. Islam's message is one of social justice, economic fairness, and fair treatment in the workplace. The Qur'an urges the proper treatment and respect of workers. As the Prophet Muhammad is quoted as saying, "None of you has faith unless you love for your brother what you love for yourself."

-excerpted from "Muslim Americans March for Immigration Reform Nationwide"
 May 01, 2006

*Statement found at www.mpac.org

Presbyterian Church (USA)

The 206th PC(USA) General Assembly (1994) adopted the “Call to Presbyterians to Recommit to Work and Pray for a Just and Compassionate U.S. Immigration Policy”. Again, in 1999 and 2004 Presbyterians, through General Assembly actions, guided by theological and ethical principals, continued to call for a commitment from both Presbyterians and the government to work toward welcoming immigrants into our communities and providing just laws that effect those who live and work in the United States. The need for immigration reform continues today. In 2006, the PC(USA) General Assembly again echoed what has been expressed for the last 50 years.

1. Reaffirm the 216th General Assembly (2004)’s “Resolution Calling for a Comprehensive Legalization Program for Immigrants Living and Working in the U.S.”
2. Affirm that our denomination, mindful of the current realities and threats to our belief system, not sway from our solidarity with, and pledge of service to, all of our brothers and sisters regardless of their race, creed, color, nationality, or residency status.
3. Affirm those Presbyterian congregations and presbyteries that are already standing alongside immigrants and are actively engaged in acts of compassion, empowerment, and advocacy.
4. Challenge each Presbyterian congregation and presbytery to embrace a comprehensive approach to “advocacy and welcome” for immigrants that includes, at the very minimum:
 - a. an opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria, and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and eventually United States citizens;
 - b. reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce waiting times for separated families who currently wait many years to be reunited;
 - c. the creation of legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to migrate to the U.S. to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected; and
 - d. border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy.
 - e. a call for living wages and safe working conditions for workers of United States-owned companies in other countries;
 - f. a call for greater economic development in poor countries to decrease the economic desperation, which forces the division of families and migration.

-excerpted from “Presbyterian Policy on Immigration,” The 217th General Assembly (2006) on Advocacy and Welcome for All Immigrants

*Statement found at <http://www.pcusa.org/immigration/pdf/immigration-resolution-2006.pdf>

Roman Catholic Church

The Church teaches that “as Catholics, we need to share our values, raise our voices, and use our votes to shape a society that protects human life, promotes family life, pursues social justice, and practices solidarity. In accordance with Catholic social teaching, and with the gospel mandate to love our neighbor and welcome the stranger, the Catholic Church commits itself to advocacy on the behalf of immigrants, migrants, and refugees:

- We advocate for just policies that respect human rights of immigrants and preserve the unity of the immigrant family, including due process, naturalization procedures, and legalization opportunities.
- We advocate for generous refugee policies that provide protection for those fleeing persecution.
- We encourage the extension of social services, citizenship classes, and community organizing efforts that secure improved housing condition, decent wages, better medical attention, and enhanced educational opportunities for immigrants, migrants, and refugees.
- We oppose efforts to stem migration that do not adequately address its root causes and that permit the continuation of the political, social, and economic inequalities that contribute to it.

-excerpted from “Called to Welcome the Stranger Among Us,” a pastoral statement approved by the Bishops of the United States, November 15, 2000

In this context of opportunity and challenge that is the new immigration, we bishops of the United States reaffirm the commitment of the Church, in the words of Pope John Paul II, to work “so that every person’s dignity is respected, the immigrant is welcomed as a brother or sister, and all humanity forms a united family which knows how to appreciate with discernment the different cultures which comprise it.” We call upon all people of good will, but Catholics especially, to welcome the newcomers in their neighborhoods and schools, in their places of work and worship, with heartfelt hospitality, openness, and eagerness both to help and learn from our brothers and sisters, of whatever race, religion, ethnicity, or background.

-excerpted from “A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops,” issued by NCCB/USCC, November 15, 2000

Union for Reform Judaism

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations has long supported a fair and generous immigration policy. Our people were and continue to be immigrants to this nation. We have benefited from open doors, and suffered when they were closed. We struggled to adjust to a society that did not always welcome our arrival. We understand the problems faced by today’s immigrants, as well as the difficulties attributable to the problem illegal immigration.

Our tradition demands of us concern for the stranger in our midst. We know that the alien and the foreigner should be treated with respect and welcomed, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt. Yet we also must support the territorial integrity of the United States and the governance of its laws. As the United States Commission on Immigration Reform explores the current state of immigration policy and suggests improvements to be made in the system, and as new legislation is proposed to confront issues raised by legal and illegal immigration, we support those efforts that compassionately seek to regulate and to aid newcomers to this land but we oppose those that will unduly restrict immigration or burden the lives of legal immigrants.

-excerpted from immigration policy adopted by the General Assembly of the Union for Reform Judaism
November 30 – December 3, 1995

Unitarian Universalist Association

Because we covenant as Unitarian Universalists to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person; and...we covenant as Unitarian Universalists to promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations...we cannot in conscience condone...the systematic refusal of human social services to needy persons and their families based on immigration status, national origin, or citizenship.” And the UUA resolved to “...demand...from both state and federal lawmakers humane solutions to the very complex social issues relating to undocumented persons in this country, and a just application of human rights at both the state and national levels for all people living within our borders; and urges individual Unitarian Universalists in the United States to serve those directly harmed and others affected by the passage of any legislation which would deny human beings the basic services warranted to all members of a free and just society.”

- excerpted from “A Call to Conscious, Humane Treatment of Immigrants,” 1995
Resolution of Immediate Witness

United Methodist Church

With grace and concern, the church must address the legal, economic, social, and human right conditions of people who are legal or undocumented immigrants, and it must oppose the introduction of legislation by Congress of any state that would cause human suffering and a denial of such individual’s rights as interpreted by our biblical understanding of God’s grace to all peoples, but especially to the sojourner... We call upon United Methodist individuals and churches in the United States and through general boards and agencies throughout the United Methodist Church to do the following:

1. Actively oppose anti-immigrant legislative action and support legislative action that protects the poor and oppressed in their quest for survival and peace;
2. Urge stringent policing and penalties for coyotes (illegal transporters);
3. Urge that humane and fair treatment be extended to all immigrants by business and agricultural groups;
4. Advocate human rights (political, economic, and civil) for all people, including the strangers who sojourn in our land;
5. support communities and congregations by prayer and action where anti-immigrant measures are implemented;
6. Continue to work with community organizations to provide forums for citizens to voice concerns, educate one another, and confront the problems of racism and fear or hatred of foreigners as obstacles to building community;
7. Continue to work with civic and legal communities who are now, or will be, affected by the destructive, deteriorating social issues raised by anti-immigrant measures;
8. Support the legal needs of immigrants through church-based immigrant clinics.

-excerpted from Social Principles 164A,
Adopted 1996, Amended and Readopted 2000