

A PRONOUNCEMENT *A Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America*

THE CHURCHES AND IMMIGRATION

Adopted by the General Board

February 27, 1962

God's sovereign claim upon all men has been proclaimed by the advent and example of His Son, Jesus Christ, in human society. Under God, men and nations are responsible to each other and for the welfare of all mankind. Nations as well as individuals are, therefore, called to respond to human need anywhere.

In this dynamic, revolutionary world, human suffering and needs, selfishness and fear are highlighted. The explosive increase of the population of our planet accentuates the problem of relations among men and nations.

Widespread migration is an important factor in our world. Some people, through voluntary migration, are attempting to overcome economic and social disadvantages, to reunite their families, and to seek larger opportunities for themselves and their loved ones. Others, because of persecution, or forceful expulsion on political, religious or racial grounds, war or natural catastrophe, have been made homeless refugees, some within their own national boundaries, some in strange lands. In good conscience, feeling their responsibility to work for justice and freedom, in different ways, many have exercised the right of men to seek sanctuary from persecution, while others have remained where they are.

In a world of dynamic change, our nation's immigration policy must be shaped by the requirements of moral principles and human values, as well as considerations of national welfare.

Christians have, therefore, appropriately devoted attention to the problems of immigration and refugees and to the roles that churches and nations can fulfill in alleviating the related, universal problems which beset and surround us. The churches have established ministries to uprooted peoples to meet their needs, under the laws established by nations. They have also sought to share their insights, gained from faith and

experience, with governments for the development of fair and effective immigration policies.

The churches and concerned members have studied world-wide social problems, including those which underlie the wish or necessity of many people to migrate. Much more study is required by many more Christians on such issues in the light of Christian faith and contemporary developments.

We, as citizens of the United States, acknowledge that our country has a responsibility to contribute to meeting the needs of a world which is in many areas in distress and overpopulated. While recognizing the limitations imposed by our economy and other factors on the number of migrants who can be absorbed by our nation, we feel that the thrust of our basic immigration law neither reflects Christian concern adequately nor furthers our national interest sufficiently. In particular, we are critical and ashamed of the racial and cultural discrimination in the present basis of our immigration quota system, resting as it does largely upon the national origins of our white population according to the census of 1920. We welcome the efforts of leaders in Government to codify, clarify, and improve legislation on this vast, complex, and in many ways, technical subject.

We believe that through increased Christian concern in immigration, the churches and their members can make a fuller witness to our faith that, under God, men and nations are responsible to each other and for the welfare of all mankind.

The General Board of the National Council of Churches, in view of ethical concerns related to Christian faith, and of the present national and world situation, with regard to migration and refugees, commends the following considerations in the first instance to the churches and their members, and in the second to governmental and intergovernmental officials and agencies:

I. TO THE CHURCHES AND THEIR MEMBERS:

A. We urge increased awareness of and concern for migrants and refugees as persons endowed with God-given dignity and worth. This means serving various needs of such persons in other parts of the world including assistance in their resettling in many areas, and also giving hospitable welcome, pastoral care, and continuing fellowship to those who come to our land seeking a new home.

B. We commend support for the freedom of men to seek sanctuary from persecution and new opportunity for themselves and their families. This freedom will only be meaningful if it is exercised in the light of responsibility to the community one leaves and to the community in which one settles.

C. We commend the ministries to the needs of uprooted people by church agencies such as Church World Service, the Department of Social Welfare, the Division of Home Missions, and United Church Women, of the National Council of Churches; the Division of Interchurch Aid, Refugee and World Service of the World Council of Churches; and the denominational and council counterparts of these agencies. We urge the continuing and strengthening of these ministries.

D. We commend the study of the problems of our world, including those related to the necessity or desire of peoples to migrate, and the search for possible answers in the light of Christian faith, realizing that migration is only a partial solution of such grave problems as that of population pressures. We urge increased attention by all people in local parishes, in councils of churches, and in the work of church men and women, to keep under constant study, and to make more alive in public concern, the laws which our Government has enacted or should enact to help meet the critical needs of mankind. Study and concern should include not only migration matters, but all those undertakings through which our nation does and can lend material as well as moral assistance to other peoples for their economic and social progress.

We commend for guidance in study and action our national church agencies such as the Department of International Affairs of the National Council of Churches, the Christian World Relations Department of United Church Women, and the denominational and council counterparts. We urge the continuing and strengthening of these ministries.

E. We urge the churches and their members to make the most effective Christian witness they can on migration and related matters, in developing public opinion and in helping those in federal and state governments and intergovernmental agencies to shape migration policies, legislation and practices which will

increasingly serve the ends of justice, freedom and peace.

For such purposes, we authorize the presentation of this pronouncement in appropriate ways to those in positions of responsibility in such matters in our Government and in the United Nations and its agencies.

II. TO GOVERNMENTAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL OFFICIALS AND AGENCIES:

We welcome the expressions of constructive proposals on immigration by both major political parties in the United States and by leaders in public life. We hope that the Congress in current session will show renewed interest in basic issues in this field and that the Administration will give strong leadership, so that the immigration policy and practices of our Government will move further toward the demands of moral principles and of humane concerns, and fulfillment of the responsibilities of the international position of the United States in its crucial role in helping to develop world community. To help our nation meet these demands and measure up to these responsibilities:

A. We urge the replacing of the method of computing the number of immigrants per year largely on the basis of the white U.S. population of the 1920 census with some better method; if a similar proportional formula is retained, we recommend as a minimum its revision to the 1960 census as a basis. The objective of these changes should be to eliminate, as far as possible, racial and regional discrimination, for instance, such racist restrictions as charge persons of Asian origin against the quota of their ancestors' country rather than their own. We believe that the elimination of all such discrimination would be a service to our national and international interests, as well as being in accord with the Christian concepts of the equal dignity and value of human beings.

B. We commend the replacing of the system whereby each country is assigned a given quota which determines the number of people who are admissible to the United States, by a system that would, irrespective of ethnic origin, distribute immigration quotas based on the following four priorities (this listing does not connote any order of preference among these four):

1. Admission of persons with occupational skills generally employable in the United States,
2. Admission of persons whose coming will tend to stimulate rather than jeopardize economic health and growth in the United States,
3. Reunion of families,
4. Admission of persons in special need, including those afflicted with ills and disabilities which make them a charge on the world's peoples, so as to carry

our nation's share of responsibility for the homeless and disfranchised.

C. We recommend that a priority for our immigration system be the enactment of permanent legislation in place of temporary measures to admit annually to the United States a number of needy refugees. Provision should be made for admission of a total number of approximately 10,000 per year, except in cases of special emergency (as for instance what happened in relation to the Hungarian Revolution) for which contingencies Congress could give authorization in advance for the President to stipulate a number that would serve the best interests of the refugees and of our country.

D. In our judgment, the established visa procedure should be used for the admission of refugees instead of the "parole" system which places unnecessary inequities upon the refugee.

E. We strongly support the principle embodied in the permanent legislation for the admission of relatives afflicted with tuberculosis so that they may rejoin their families.

F. We strongly support the principle embodied in the permanent legislation for the admission of orphan children under 14 years of age who are to be adopted by U.S. citizens.

G. We urge that naturalized citizens receive equal treatment in every respect with native-born citizens except in cases of fraud or wilful misrepresentation at the time of their entry and/or naturalization. Naturalized citizens who have rightfully gained that status should not be subject to deportation. Resident aliens should not be deported without due process of law and the opportunity for judicial review, operating within a reasonable statute of limitations.

H. We propose the establishment of a National Citizens' Advisory Commission to study migration and refugee problems, and related matters such as population pressures. This Commission would provide comprehensive studies and guidance on the questions of migration of peoples to the United States.

91 FOR, 2 AGAINST, 1 ABSTENTION