

A Theological Statement on Immigration

In Scripture, the ethical responsibility of extending hospitality to the stranger is a key requirement of faithfulness. At the center of Christian ethics is the challenge and the opportunity to love the stranger as ourselves and to love the stranger as one with whom Jesus explicitly identifies.

In the national context of the current debate on immigration it is imperative for Christian churches to be bearers of the biblical and historical tradition of hospitality in our own local contexts. This means that the people of God must practice mercy to the stranger. In Scripture, the stranger is often characterized by the condition of vulnerability. Their vulnerability reminds us of our own dependence on the kindness of God and instructs us to act towards the stranger as God has acted towards us.

The stranger, by definition, is an outsider, and may be excluded from the networks which insiders rely on for the satisfaction of their daily needs. Therefore, Christian teaching about hospitality insists that strangers be treated the same as insiders and so, the outsider becomes our neighbor. The stranger is created in the image of God and shares the same rights as the rest of us simply because of their humanness.

In welcoming the stranger the people of God are required to establish justice on their behalf. Given the vulnerability of undocumented migrants in the United States, the role of churches advocating for the stranger is a crucial matter of justice and a corporate expression of our faith. Political advocacy is a legitimate aspect of the mission of the church for it affirms the human dignity of migrants and seeks to ensure their equal access to economic, social, and political resources. Justice for the stranger means that those who contribute to our communities should be given opportunities for full membership in these communities.

Lastly, in welcoming the stranger the people of God must seek transforming relationships with the stranger. In Scripture, the stranger often appears as a “herald,” or one who brings news. In the book of Hebrews, the writer says in giving hospitality to the stranger you may be welcoming an angel without knowing it. Therefore, we as God’s people welcome the stranger not only because we are commanded to do so, but because through their lives and their stories we hear the good news of God’s love and faithfulness to all of humanity. In the presence of the stranger God is calling us to new horizons

of opportunity and responsibility, in which, hospitality to the stranger is necessary for the church's faithfulness to God.

In the history of the U.S. there is no question that immigration changes both residents and immigrants. We are mutually transformed. In responding directly to the challenges of immigration, the biblical ethic of hospitality leads Christian churches to emphasize, not the threats, but rather the gifts and the possibilities for a creative multicultural community which immigrants bring to us.

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