



## National Council of Churches USA

Office of the General Secretary



## Church World Service

Office of the Executive Director

*"You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."*

*Deuteronomy 10:19*

February 16, 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

As Christian leaders, we write to you on the eve of our shared Lenten journey about an issue of urgent concern to all of us in this nation: Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

Today, more than 12 million immigrants living in the United States find themselves without the hope of becoming citizens, reuniting with family members or enjoying the legal protections that most of us take for granted. Yet many of these people have lived and worked in our communities for years, becoming our friends and family, and often performing the daily tasks that enhance our quality of life.

Unless there are major policy changes enacted by the U.S. Congress, many of these people will continue to languish in the shadows and be subjected to abuse, discrimination and hardships that are contrary to the Gospel values of love, unity and the affirmation of the dignity of all people.

The preamble to the "Resolution on Immigration and a Call for Action" adopted by our member churches at the 2008 General Assembly of the National Council of Churches USA and Church World Service states

*"In a world fragmented by fearfulness, Christians proclaim a divine love that casts out fear (1John4:18) and binds even those the world calls enemies (Matthew 5:44). In a society still divided by race and increasingly divided into haves and have nots, Christians affirm a vision of community in which every neighbor is valued as a child of God (Genesis 1:27) and all neighbors have enough (Luke 6). In a world fractured by suspicion of those who are "other," Christians have heard a command to welcome strangers (Genesis 18, Hebrews 13:2), even as Christ has welcomed us (Romans 15:7)."*

These words remind us that as Christians we are called to affirm our interrelatedness and interdependence with every child of God, and are called not only to come to the aid of one another, but are commanded to rise to support those who are marginalized in our society.

In response to this divine mandate, and as a patriotic act in the spirit of our nation's best values and traditions, we join together with our brothers and sisters from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Association of Evangelicals, National Hispanic Leadership Conference and millions of other people of faith throughout the country in calling for comprehensive immigration reform that will improve and protect the lives of millions of people, in accordance with the U.S. Constitution and international agreements.

We understand that change of our immigration system will not be easy. Yet we also believe change is possible. We are encouraged that President Obama and key leaders from both the Democratic and Republican parties have agreed that reform is needed, that key legislation, such as Representative Gutierrez's "Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity" bill (CIR ASAP) has already been introduced, and that additional reform legislation from Senator Schumer and others will be introduced in the weeks ahead.

We also know that for humane immigration reform to be enacted, your faithful witness as to the importance of comprehensive immigration reform will be needed. *We ask you to be present, be connected and help organize immigration reform efforts in your local community.* Actions to consider include:

- 1.) Host a prayer vigil or community event to pray for immigrants and call for immigration reform, inviting your members of Congress and local media to attend
- 2.) Dedicate a sermon, bible study theme, or series of Sunday School lessons to Christ's teachings to welcome the stranger, love our neighbors, and work for justice
- 3.) Call, write, and meet with your members of Congress – individually and as a community group - to urge them to support immigration reform
- 4.) Organize members of your community, or send representatives, to Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD) March 19<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> and a rally for immigration reform on March 21<sup>st</sup>.
- 5) Get connected to and utilize resources related to your denomination's efforts on immigration reform.

Many congregations have already hosted prayer vigils, met with their members of Congress, are coordinating bus loads of congregants to attend Ecumenical Advocacy Days, and are ready to provide help to other congregations who want to act now. Resources for hosting a prayer vigil and meeting with Congress, policy positions and electronic postcard for individuals to sign, and a community calendar to post events, can be found at [www.interfaithimmigration.org](http://www.interfaithimmigration.org). Information on EAD can be found at <http://advocacydays.org>, and additional resources can be found at [www.nccusa.org/immigration](http://www.nccusa.org/immigration) or by contacting Jen Smyers, Associate for Immigration and Refugee Policy Church World Service. Jen can be reached at 202.481.6935 or [jsmyers@churchworldservice.org](mailto:jsmyers@churchworldservice.org).

As in years past, we are at a significant moment of convergence where our faith commitments and values and the needs of millions of disenfranchised people converge. We join together in stating our commitment to advocate for comprehensive immigration reform that is humane and effective and that upholds the human and civil rights of immigrants.

Our prayer and hope is that you will invite your fellow believers to join you in advocacy for justice in this crucial and historic time.

Many Blessings,



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NCCUSA General Secretary



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CWS Executive Director and CEO

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