



## **A CALL TO ACTION ON COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM**

**ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES  
AND CHURCH WORLD SERVICE, NEW ORLEANS, NOVEMBER 10, 2010**

### **BACKGROUND**

In September 2008, the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service, following actions by the boards of both organizations, adopted a "Resolution on Immigration and a Call for Action." The resolution declared the unqualified support of both organizations for immigration reform, and their firm commitment to support local congregations in national and local advocacy for immigrants and their families.

Since that time, people of faith have become increasingly involved in advocating for immigration reform. In the past two years, faith communities have hosted more than 300 prayer vigils calling for expressions of welcome for immigrants by local communities and for moral courage on the part of politicians to bring about immigration reform.

Activities aimed at creating a welcoming atmosphere have included potluck dinners and other fellowship events to bring recent immigrants and U.S.-born community members together. In addition, thousands of persons of faith have met with their members of Congress to urge their support of immigration reform.

Both the National Council of Churches and Church World Service and their member communions have been actively engaged in these and other initiatives to advance reform and to facilitate ministries to those persons caught in the current immigration dilemma.

Congregations have held scripture studies and pastors have preached on the topic of welcoming the stranger. Many communities around the country have participated in a nationwide fast and prayer chain based on the call in Isaiah 58:6 (*"Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"* NRSV)

As deportations have increased over the past year, congregations have increased their support and outreach to immigrant communities, assisting family members during the

deportation and detention of their loved ones. Most recently, thousands of people of faith called their members of Congress during a national call-in day supporting the DREAM Act, which would provide a pathway to legal status for children who, by no fault of their own, do not have legal status.

In April 2010, the Arizona legislature enacted an anti-immigrant bill, SB 1070, which would have mandated local police act as federal immigration officials and encouraged racial profiling by police, social service providers, and community members in an effort to expand apprehension of undocumented immigrants. Our immigrant brothers and sisters – citizens, green card holders, and undocumented immigrants – live in a state of fear - fear of exploitation, discrimination, apprehension, detention, and deportation from their families. While a federal judge blocked the most controversial parts of SB 1070, it sparked a nation-wide conversation which has led to more than 22 states considering similar types of legislation.

Since the enactment of this harsh legislation in Arizona, faith leaders from around the country traveled together to that state to stand in solidarity with immigrants and return to their communities with their first-hand accounts of the fear that is plaguing the immigrant community. Faith leaders have also reported on the organizing efforts in Arizona that bring hope to those facing injustice.

Be that as it may, the immigration debate has become increasingly heated, and situations around the country have proven that the need for immigration reform is greater than ever. For example, the Fremont, Nebraska provision to require landlords and employers to check immigration status and deny housing and employment to undocumented immigrants has created an atmosphere of dread. The unprecedented power given to landlords and employers intimidates immigrants who feel it is unsafe to report crimes or exploitative practices of landlords or employers. As a result of this reluctance to contact law enforcement officials, community safety as a whole is jeopardized. Examples of this are common in areas where undocumented immigrants avoid contact with police, landlords and employers for fear they will be deported.

Unfortunately, the Fremont law has prompted similar action around the country.

Even more alarming in the national debate are proposals calling for the revocation of the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which has defined citizenship and the rights of citizens since the Civil War. Such proposals have garnered media attention and support, despite the fact that should they be enacted, children of undocumented immigrants born in the U.S. would be stateless persons.

These widespread anti-immigrant efforts underscore the pressing need for the federal government to take immediate action on humane immigration reform. Without reform, United States immigration policies have and will increasingly become a confusing, dangerous patchwork of ineffective and counterproductive laws.

## CALL TO ACTION

As we observe the increase of terror and fear in our communities due to anti-immigration legislation and increased deportations, we declare as persons of faith that we must recommit ourselves to stand with our immigrant brothers and sisters, our neighbors, to do all we can to enact immigration reform.

Trusting in God and God's justice, we issue the following call to action:

**We call on the President of the United States and leaders of the Congress** to recommit themselves to the comprehensive, effective and humane reform of immigration laws and enforcement structures.

**We call on one another**, members of the boards of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service and the representatives of member communions to the General Assembly, as well as the millions of faithful Christians who worship in our churches, to actively engage national, state and local legislators to insist on comprehensive immigration reform at every level.

**We commit ourselves** to engage national, state and local legislators to voice our opposition to Arizona's anti-immigrant SB 1070 and similar laws that have been introduced in more than 22 states. Moreover, we commit ourselves to help educate our communities about the dangerous consequences such laws have on our nation and local communities, and we commit to one another to join in prayer and advocacy for those who are harmed by unjust legislation as well as for those who are working to overturn it.

**We call on one another** and on member communions to take part in the upcoming "New Year's Resolution Campaign" which asks people of faith to make a New Year's resolution to call their members of Congress each week with the simple message: "I'm your constituent and I support immigration reform that reunites families and helps undocumented immigrants. What are you doing to support immigration reform?"<sup>i</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At no point in our lives will we be able to say with complete honesty and full conviction that we have done all we can to fulfill Christ's call to ministry in Matthew 25:36-46. However, by fully engaging our communities in direct service, welcome, education, and advocacy on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters, we will have found a way to faithfully pursue this vital and definitive call to "welcome the stranger."

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<sup>i</sup> The campaign will include YouTube videos featuring faith leaders and lay persons sharing their stories, reflections, and New Year's Resolutions to help enact immigration reform, as well as blog posts, bulletin inserts, and reminder magnets to encourage others to do the same and call their members of Congress once a week in support of immigration reform. CWS and NCC members can support this effort of the Interfaith

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Immigration Coalition by disseminating information and resources to local congregations, helping them implement this campaign through theological reflections on immigration and the new year, and by featuring their faith leaders in the YouTube videos and blogs promoting the campaign and cross posting these resources on their respective websites.