

February 13, 2012
Testimony Regarding HB 2712
Bishop Scott J. Jones, Kansas Area of The United Methodist Church

I wish to offer my support for House Bill 2712 and to speak on behalf of The United Methodist Church on the subject of illegal immigration more broadly.

Along with my colleague bishops from other churches and many other Christian groups, I am urging the Kansas Legislature to make Kansas a place that treats immigrants with the kind of hospitality and humane consideration that has been a hallmark of our state for more than 150 years.

We have repeatedly articulated three principles:

1. All persons are beloved by God and should be treated with dignity and respect. Leviticus 19:33-34 commands us to welcome the alien among us.

2. Kansas needs immigrants for a variety of reasons. Our economy, our culture and our way of life are enhanced by increased diversity. Just as immigration from Germany, Sweden, Norway, Russia, Korea, Vietnam and other countries has shaped our state for 150 years, so new immigrants from different countries will help us in many ways. We should welcome them and focus our efforts on genuine hospitality.

3. We must respect the laws of our country. We are a country of laws and respect for law is crucial to our way of life. Scripture also commands us to respect and obey governmental authorities. We are a nation shaped by the rule of law. An economic and demographic situation that creates millions of persons who are not able to live with the full protection of the law is both unjust and detrimental to our future development. We should call upon the Federal government to find a legal way to resolve this situation for the benefit of all concerned.

House Bill 2712 exemplifies these principles. It recognizes we need these workers for our Kansas economy. It provides a way for them to contribute their labor and to receive the protection of our laws. It also recognizes the rule of law. It provides the kind of welcome we want to provide.

As a spiritual leader, I want to point to a larger need we have. Kansas needs people. We are worried about population decline in our rural counties. We need people with good values and strong family traditions. Our state is a better place with people who bring new ideas, new energy and new traditions to our communities.

On the other hand, you are considering some bills that I believe violate Christian principles. House Bill 2578 violates the biblical value of hospitality which has been a hallmark of our Kansas culture. By creating a hostile environment, we are sending a message that all persons of Hispanic origin are not welcome in our state.

House Bill 2576 has the same effect with an additional problem. It may criminalize my behavior. The United Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church and many other Christian bodies are evangelizing Hispanic persons and welcoming them to Christian worship. I have preached the gospel in front of groups of Hispanics, ministering to their spiritual needs and offering to help them make Kansas a home for their families. I know many of these people and they are people with strong family values. But I cannot vouch for their immigration status. Do you expect me to ask for proof of citizenship as they enter our churches? If I preach the gospel or teach them English, and it turns out they are undocumented immigrants, am I guilty of harboring them and thus of a felony since there are more than 10 of them in the group? Please don't send me or my preachers to jail for our obedience to Christ.