

Council of Bishops Immigration Task Force
The United Methodist Church

Report and Recommendations
May 4, 2017

Today across the U.S. immigrant men, women and children in our communities and our churches are living in fear because they are being increasingly victimized by detention, deportation, family separation, and acts of hate based on their immigration status, country of origin, race, religion and other differences that are used to justify unjust immigration policies and inhumane treatment. We join our denomination's United Methodist Immigration Task Force in calling upon The United Methodist Church to unequivocally denounce such policies and practices.

We further call upon every United Methodist local church, district and annual conference to follow Jesus' command to welcome and love the immigrant among us. We strongly encourage our United Methodist connection to respond boldly to the suffering of our immigrant brothers and sisters by providing them sanctuary – relationally, spiritually, and physically.

We call upon the bishops of the church to continue and further strengthen their work in leading a caring and healing response to immigrant families and communities. The pastoral presence of our bishops among hurting and fearful immigrants has brought comfort and hope to immigrant men, women and children. The exercise of the teaching office of our episcopal leaders in relationship to how the church is called to respond to immigrants and refugees has helped to change a culture of complacency and often hostility toward the immigrant within our own United Methodist Church and in the communities where we serve. The prophetic voice of our Council of Bishops, and individual bishops as they serve in their residential areas, has been critical in deterring new expressions of unjust and inhumane treatment toward immigrants and not allowed the U.S. to rest on its broken immigration policies.

This is the day for The UMC to act with conviction and courage, giving life to its commitment to be disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. How we respond to the immigration crisis at this moment, will determine the vitality of the church for generations to come.

Our United Methodist Immigration Task Force, a collaborative table composed of representatives from our general board and agencies, racial ethnic plans and caucuses, and the Council of Bishops, is working to assist The United Methodist Church in responding to what have been identified as the most pressing needs:

- 1. Providing sanctuary to those immigrants who are most vulnerable;**
- 2. Caring for immigrant women and children;**
- 3. Standing with immigrant young people;**
- 4. Working for just U.S. immigration policies;**
- 5. Standing in Solidarity with United Methodists in Central America**
- 6. Implementing the Ecumenical Declaration: Protecting Welcome, Restoring Hope.**

We encourage each episcopal area to consider how they can identify, prepare and resource one sanctuary congregation in its area to provide physical safety to undocumented persons or families threatened by detention or deportation so that their right to due process and legal redress of any grievances they may have, may be addressed. Providing physical sanctuary for immigrant brothers and sisters gives The UMC the opportunity to grow spiritually in relationship to the immigrant as we practice what Jesus has called us to do. Such sanctuary relationships also provide an opportunity to offer up a prophetic witness of what a world transformed could look like.

We would request that other congregations be strongly encouraged to provide sanctuary in other ways as described in the sanctuary tool kit that has been prepared for the use of United Methodist congregations.

Annual Conferences are asked to work with jurisdictional immigration task forces that are being organized to assist them in their immigration work.

The United Methodist Immigration Task Force will work with every episcopal area to provide guidance and support in the creation of a connectional network of sanctuary churches, including providing a list of United Methodist congregations participating in the sanctuary movement.

Our United Methodist boards and agencies are providing resources for the Church's work in response to the immigration crisis. A denominational resource guide will be provided to the Council of Bishops, conference directors of connectional ministries, and district superintendents.

The immigration and migration work of The United Methodist Church has been left in the care of its boards and agencies, and racial-ethnic plans and caucuses but without any funding for this critical work. It has been assumed that the boards and agencies, and racial-ethnic plans and caucuses would simply absorb the cost. Even the United Methodist Immigration Task Force established by action of the General Conference in 2000 and continued at each subsequent General Conference has not received funding. No budget request has been made thus far. Boards and agencies, and racial-ethnic plans

and caucuses have covered the cost of this ministry and have done faithful work in behalf of the whole Church.

However, the present immigration and migration crisis around the world calls for a greater investment in this ministry by the Church. Funding is especially needed for the work of jurisdictional immigration task forces that are being organized to resource annual conferences, a critical base from which to address global migration. A proposal for funding will be presented to the Connectional Table at its upcoming meeting by the United Methodist Immigration Task Force. Specifically, a request will be made to provide \$200,000 to be shared equally among the 5 jurisdictional immigration task forces for their work of training and organizing conference leaders, in consultation with colleges of bishops, to address the immigration and migration crisis and resource annual conferences in other ways that may be helpful. We would ask the Council of Bishops to add its support to this request to the Connectional Table.

In addition, we commend the attached *Ecumenical Declaration: Protecting Welcome, Restoring Hope*, to the Council of Bishops. This declaration comes out of the work of Church World Service and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA in response to the global migration crisis. The United Methodist Church is an active member of these bodies.

After consultation with the leadership of the General Council on Finance and Administration, the Connectional Table, and the General Board of Global Ministries, Discipleship Ministries, and United Methodist Communications, we would strongly recommend that in support of the *Ecumenical Declaration* we work connectionally to approve and set a Sunday in this year to prayerfully remember the plight of migrants all around the globe, and gather an offering that would be dedicated to responding to the human suffering caused by forced migration through the Advance for migration as required by paragraph 823 of our *Book of Discipline*.

Finally, we would ask that you would receive our entire report with prayerful commitment.

Respectfully,

The Council of Bishops Immigration Task Force

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