

TITLE: A Resolution in Support of the Interfaith Platform on Immigration Reform

DATE SUBMITTED: February 28, 2011

SUBMITTED BY Task Force on Immigration of MN Conference UCC (Members: Paula Bidle, Chr., (612) 702-8246, Lyndale United Church of Christ, Mpls.; Bob Malles, (651) 497-4564, Spirit of the Lakes/Minnehaha UCC, Mpls.; Betty Jo Braun, Zion UCC, Le Sueur; Don Christensen, (651) 690-2609, Macalester-Plymouth United Church, St. Paul; Alison Kileen, First Congregational Church of MN, Mpls.; Aleta Christopherson, First Congregational UCC, Austin; Steve Deschene, First Congregational Church, Grand Marais).

SUMMARY OF INTENT: This resolution declares the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ a signatory to the Interfaith Platform on Immigration Reform, mandates letters of advocacy to specific federal and state government leaders, and invites the members and congregations of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ to learn about, study, and consider advocating for immigration reform.

FISCAL NOTE: The only funding implication is the cost of these mailings.

WHEREAS Minnesota communities have been the sites of several major enforcement actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), including Worthington (site of one of the December 12, 2006, Swift plant raids), Willmar and Austin, Minnesota (both sites of home raids); and

WHEREAS ICE is now engaging in 'silent' I-9 raids in Minnesota resulting in hundreds of immigrants being discharged from their jobs, too often without recourse, (Chipotle in late 2010, over 400 workers; ABM in late 2009, some 1200 workers discharged); and

WHEREAS Minnesota's children and families are being traumatized and damaged and the best interests of the children and families is being ignored or neglected (the following from *Severing A Lifeline: The Neglect of Citizen Children in America's Immigration Enforcement Policy*, James D. Kremer, Kathleen A. Moccio, Joseph W. Hammell; Editorial Advisory Committee: Prof. Katherine Fennelly, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs University of Minnesota; Prof. David B. Thronson, William S. Boyd School of Law University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Prof. Esther Wattenberg, Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, University of Minnesota; Benjamin Johnson, Executive Director of the American Immigration Law Foundation; A Report by Dorsey & Whitney LLP to The Urban Institute):

- a. Willmar, Minnesota: reports include a "litany of derogatory and insensitive actions by (ICE) agents, including waking up and interrogating frightened children. 'Plaintiff children now suffer from waning appetites, disrupted, sleep, nightmares, and behavioral difficulties from the loss of a parent and/or from the aggressive encounter with Defendants.'"
- b. Worthington, Minnesota: "Returning home after school, Miguel discovered his mother and father missing, and his two-year-old brother alone. For the next week, Miguel stayed at home caring for his brother, not knowing what had become of his parents. Not until a week after the raid, when his grandmother was able to make her way to Worthington to care for her frightened grandchildren, was Miguel able to return to school. According to his teacher, this previously 'happy little boy' had become 'absolutely catatonic.' His attendance became spotty at best. His grades plummeted. At the end of the school year, Miguel was not able to advance to the third grade with the rest of his class."

WHEREAS there are hundreds of talented undocumented culturally 'American' Minnesota students who were brought to the United States by their parents but who do not have a pathway to lawful permanent residence and eventual earned citizenship. These young people include honor roll students, star athletes, talented artists, and aspiring teachers, doctors, and entrepreneurs. They include these Minnesotans (these are real Minnesota students, however to protect them, their 'real' names are not being used):

- a. Jose's Story – "Today I am student body president at a private college in Minnesota, but I was once a high school dropout because I thought a college education was not a possibility for me. I came to the U.S. from Mexico in 2003 at the age of 15 so that my family could be reunited.... I think of the United States as my country. I graduate next spring with a degree in Justice and Peace Studies, and I hope one day to be able to serve my community through a career in education policy or as an elected official."

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b. Alexandria's Story – "When I was fourteen, my family moved from Mexico to find a better life due to the economic hardships we faced there. . . . However, I had no role in the decision to come to this country. I had to suffer a lot on my way here. I did not realize that by being as an undocumented student in this country I would have to go through obstacles even higher than the rest of my peers. I had to learn a new language, a new culture and be able to survive to culture shock because I wanted to get a higher education. . . . I graduated with a 3.5 GPA. I was part of the National Honor Society for being one of the best students in my school in the year of 200_."

WHEREAS all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26 & 27), and

WHEREAS the older testament declares, "When the alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34 and 24:22); and

WHEREAS Jesus calls us to "welcome the stranger" (Matthew 25:31-46); and

WHEREAS the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the Minnesota Council of Churches, the Service Employees International Union, and 17 other Minnesota business, faith, and justice groups have signed a joint statement declaring:

"The growth rate of Minnesota's workforce is declining. Even during challenging economic times there are a wide range of jobs that are left unfilled and employers frequently rely on the immigrant workforce to fill these positions. When these jobs are left unfilled, the economy as a whole does not function properly. Immigrants help to relieve the worker shortage for many companies. Thus, we need immigrant workers with a wide variety of skill sets."

WHEREAS "by one estimate, if immigrants were removed from the labor force, Minnesota would lose over 24,000 permanent jobs and \$1.2 billion in personal income" (*2009 The Economic Impact of Immigrants in Minnesota*, Katherine Fennelly Professor Anne Huart Master's Candidate Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs University Of Minnesota, Op. cit.); and

WHEREAS "Despite the clear demand of U.S. business for relatively lowskilled, immigrant labor that cannot be met by native-born workers, the number of permanent visas available for the lawful entry of less-skilled workers is limited to 5,000 per year. Similarly, the ability of lower-skilled workers to obtain temporary works visas is constrained by numerical caps and substantive limitations. Family sponsored admissions are also limited and plagued by bureaucratic delays often decades in length. . . . In short, the oft-stated refrain that the undocumented immigrant should have simply "gotten in line" for a visa and entered lawfully is based on a false premise – there was and is no meaningful line for the immigrant to 'get in'" (*Severing A Lifeline*, Op. cit.); and

WHEREAS an enforcement only approach to the problems in our nation's immigration system is leading to discrimination against all immigrants, driving the undocumented immigrants 'deeper' into an underground of marginal employment, and damaging our economy; and

WHEREAS the light of the Statue of Liberty shines over this famous text by Emma Lazarus, declaring our welcome to immigrants: "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

WHEREAS the Thirteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirms the obligation of governments to provide justice for all persons under their jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS national United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries has signed the principles of the Interfaith Platform on Immigration Reform;

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1 THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 2011 annual meeting of the Minnesota Conference of the
2 United Church of Christ condemns the current system of immigration law as immoral and unjust, and
3 deplores the current law as fostering a climate of institutionalized racism and classism, and
4

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2011 annual meeting of the Minnesota Conference of the United
6 Church of Christ declares its support of the principles set forth in the Interfaith Platform on Humane
7 Immigration Reform:
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9 **Uphold family unity as a priority of all immigration policies**

10 To expeditiously reunite immigrant families separated due to lengthy visa backlogs; Revise
11 family preference categories and per-country caps to prioritize family unity; Remove bars to
12 reentry and adjustment of status to individuals seeking to reunite with their family members.
13 Reject attempts to deny birthright citizenship to the children of immigrants, or placing family-
14 based and employment-based visa applicants in competition with each other.
15

16 **Create a process for undocumented immigrants to earn their legal status and eventual
17 citizenship**

18 The workability of such a program should not be hindered by overly punitive criteria, such as
19 mandating that immigrants leave the country or pay exorbitant fees, or by making the process
20 conditional upon the implementation of enforcement measures.
21

22 **Protect workers and provide efficient channels of entry for new immigrant workers**

23 Their rights must be fully protected, including the ability to bring their families with them, travel
24 as needed, change their place of employment, peacefully organize, and apply for lawful
25 permanent residency and eventual citizenship.
26

27 **Facilitate immigrant integration**

28 The U.S. immigration system should provide financial support to state and local governments and
29 community organizations that offer language and civics education, outreach, and naturalization
30 application assistance. Citizenship should be made more affordable by reducing naturalization
31 fees and making fee waivers more easily accessible. Counterproductive laws prohibiting
32 immigrants from accessing social services and mandating the local police to act as immigration
33 officials should be revoked.
34

35 **Restore due process protections and reform detention policies**

36 Witnessing the toll of raids and incarceration on detainees, their families and our communities,
37 we urge the Administration and Congress to reduce the use of detention for immigrants and
38 improve detention conditions such as increased access to pastoral care, legal counsel and legal
39 orientation programs.
40

41 **Align the enforcement of immigration laws with humanitarian values**

42 To truly decrease undocumented immigration, the United States should improve access to the
43 legal immigration system by increasing the number of ports of entry, expanding visa availability,
44 and eliminating application backlogs. Border policies must be consistent with humanitarian
45 values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the United States to
46 implement immigration laws and identify and prevent the entry of persons who commit
47 dangerous crimes.
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50 **Immigration: A matter of human rights**

51 As people of faith, we call attention to the moral dimensions of public policy and recommend
52 reforms that uphold the God-given dignity and rights of every person, each of whom is made in
53 the image of God.

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55 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ add its name to
56 the Interfaith Platform on Immigration as a supporting organization and that it urges the individual
57 members and congregations to also sign the Interfaith Platform on Humane Immigration Reform.

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59 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2011 annual meeting of the Minnesota Conference United
60 Church of Christ directs the Conference Minister, in consultation with the Immigration Task Force, to
61 prepare and send within 30 days of the adoption of this resolution a letter to President Obama and to each
62 member of Minnesota's Congressional delegation. This letter will include a copy of this resolution. The
63 letter will urge them to work together in the 112th Congress to enact Comprehensive Immigration Reform
64 that is based on these principles. The letter is to be on Conference letterhead and is to be signed by the
65 Conference Minister.

66
67 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2011 annual meeting of the Minnesota Conference United
68 Church of Christ directs the Conference Minister, in consultation with the Immigration Task Force, to
69 prepare and send within 30 days of the adoption of this resolution a letter to Minnesota Governor Mark
70 Dayton and to the leadership of both parties in the Minnesota house and the Minnesota Senate reminding
71 them that immigration is a federal issue. This letter will include a copy of this resolution. It will also
72 urge them to work together and lobby President Obama and the Minnesota Congressional delegation to
73 enact federal immigration reform based on the principles in this resolution in the 112th Congress.

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75 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference United
76 Church of Christ urges its members and congregations to:

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- 78 a. Sign up for and respond to legislative alerts at the web site of The Advocates for Human
79 Rights (<http://www.energyofanation.org/>);
 - 80
 - 81 b. Engage in Biblical reflection on the issue of immigration using one or more of the 54-
82 immigration related scriptures available at the United Church of Christ web site
83 (<http://www.ucc.org/justice/immigration/worship/worship-resources/biblical-references-to.html>);
 - 84
 - 85 c. Contact the Conference Immigration Task Force to arrange for speakers and to learn of other
86 resources that can assist in their study and reflection on the reasons for migration and immigrants
87 in the United States, and offering a faithful response as both individuals and as a congregation.

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