

Racism and Immigration: A Critical Response

A Position Paper of the General Commission on Religion and Race,
The United Methodist Church

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August 2007

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 gate.

Fragment of Emma Lazarus' classic poem,
"The New Colossus," cast in bronze on the Statue of Liberty

Introduction

Human migration is not a phenomenon of the twentieth or twenty-first century, nor even of the past 500 years. The fact of the matter is that human migration is as old as the human race. This migration process, which has taken place throughout the centuries, has enriched the human family and helped us become the people we are today. As circumstances continue to challenge people to move away from their homelands, as the desire of the human spirit for challenges and changes continues, people will continue to migrate in search of that new experience and in search of better living and spiritual conditions that enrich life.

Human migration continues to be a multifaceted question. It's made even more complex in this era by the negative impacts of globalization, which are the key factors in pushing over 130 million people around the world to migrate today. Only a little over 1 million actually come to the U.S. But nativist and racist forces would have us believe that at least 25 percent of the world's migrants are beating down our doors wanting to come in. "The truth is that most people are migrating within the Global South. They are continuing to migrate for many of the same reasons as they have historically: poverty, unemployment, civil strife, and concern for the well-being of their families. Under globalization, many of those conditions have worsened. It's also under globalization that the ease of migration is taking place. Transportation, which is used to move goods across oceans, rivers, and countries, is also used in migration. That is also a contributing factor. And it's historic."¹

Thousands of years of human migration will not be stopped because today's nation-states do not want dark skin and non-Christian people from the south come into their lands.

Over the last one hundred years in the United States there has been a history of anti-immigrant behavior impregnated with racism and nativism. This history has revealed a contradiction in American society between a deep sense of acceptance and welcome versus a profound sense of fear of the unknown. It is a history that discloses the struggles of the American people between their own dream of equality and "good will towards all" countered by an ugly, deep-seated racist ideology. In the United States this ideology of racism can be seen in different expressions of white dominant culture. However, in this paper we will explore it by looking at federal legislation and state and local anti-immigrant responses around the country.

¹ Statement of Cathi Tactaquin, founder and director of the Oakland-based National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, an alliance of grassroots, community, labor, and faith organizations. Quoted in "Immigration and Racism: An Interview With Miriam Ching Louie and Cathi Tactaquin," by David Barsamian <<http://www.zmag.org/ZMag/Articles/nov01barsamian.htm>>

As we seek to understand U.S. attitudes towards immigration we must address the development of Congressional legislation, which reveals trends and sentiments present in our society regarding immigrants. As in many other instances in U.S. history, these trends and sentiments are fueled by disinformation and the exploitation of working people's fears of losing their jobs in a labor environment that lacks protection for them.

In this paper I propose to respond to the issue of racism in the present debate over immigration. Some people have argued that it is not about race, but about securing our borders and being a nation of laws. I submit that the truth is that the present immigration debate has been and is fueled by racism. In his new book, *State of Emergency*, political commentator Pat Buchanan argues for "an immediate moratorium on all immigration," because he believes in the preservation of white dominance in America. Buchanan explains on page 11:

*America faces an existential crisis. If we do not get control of our borders by 2050 Americans of European descent will be a minority in the nation their ancestors created and built. No nation has ever undergone so radical a demographic transformation and survived.*²

Mr. Buchanan is right, but only in a macabre way; we just need to ask the Native peoples of this hemisphere in order to corroborate his assessment. Apparently Mr. Buchanan does not think that African Americans, or Chinese, or Japanese, or Latinos, or Native Americans have made any contribution to create and build this nation. Such a selective reading of the history of the building of the nation betrays a racist ideology so often characteristic of anti-immigrant sentiments.

He is also right in his assessment of the radical "demographic transformation" that immigrants will bring. Indeed, immigrants will change the face and make-up of American society. There will be the birth of a new people of the Americas. A people that José Vasconcelos has called the "cosmic race."³

New immigrants are facing racism all over the country. People who are organizing to challenge old prejudices and discrimination are recognizing that if they are going to make a difference they will have to consider the demographic change that is sweeping across the country. This is a challenge to white supremacy and white privilege, which also means that they must organize not only the African American community but the new immigrant communities as well, in order to build the new base for an antiracist movement.

Legislative History

Under Section 8, Article I, of the United States Constitution, Congress has the responsibility to legislate what should be our country's policy regarding immigration. (At least that is how the Supreme Court has interpreted the first article.⁴) Therefore, it behooves us to

² Patrick J. Buchanan, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006. See and read also the interview at "More Border Disorder! Is Pat Buchanan's Worst Nightmare Coming True?" Thursday, August 31, 2006, Fox News (<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,211527,00.html>)

³ José Vasconcelos's quote in Virgilio Elizondo's work *Galilean Journey: The Mexican American Promise*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983.

⁴ The power of Congress "to exclude aliens from the United States and to prescribe the terms and conditions on which they come in" is absolute, being an attribute of the United States as a sovereign nation. "That the government of the United States, through the action of the legislative department, can exclude aliens from its territory is a proposition which we do not think open to controversy. Jurisdiction over its own territory to that extent is an incident of every independent nation. It is a part of its independence. If it could not exclude aliens, it would be to that extent subject to the control of another power. . . . The United States, in their relation to foreign countries and

explore the Congressional history regarding its work on immigration. According to the historical record, Congress has enacted immigration laws that were racist and arbitrary toward people from non-European countries. We find it telling that these laws have been rarely challenged by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The first immigration law passed by Congress set the tone for future attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. The National Immigration Act of 1790 stated that, “any alien, being a free white person who shall have resided within the limits of the United States for a term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof.”⁵ This legislation clearly designated the group of people for whom the legislation was drafted: “*free white persons.*” The Founding Fathers wanted to make sure we kept our country white and European. Later, in 1798, Congress expanded this law to address broader national issues.⁶

However, the above criteria did not last long. Early in the 19th century it was not enough to be “free and white.” During the great immigration movements of that time Jews, Italians, and Irish were seen by the white-Anglo-Saxon Protestants as inferior racial groups. By the middle of the century Irish and blacks were positioned at the bottom of America’s social strata. In *How the Irish Became White*, Noel Ignatiev states: “In antebellum America, it was speculated that if racial amalgamation was ever to take place it would begin between these two groups.”⁷ Late in the 19th century, Italians were to take the place of the Irish near the bottom of America’s social scale.

During the 19th century and early into the 20th century, Congress began to pay attention to the issue of immigration due to the large number of European immigrants coming into the United States. However, it was not until after the Civil War that Congress became more concerned with immigration issues, especially with the distinctions between documented and undocumented immigrants, and in particular with immigrants coming from southern Europe and non-European countries.

Consequently, Congress’ initial attempts to address immigration policy were characterized by racist and discriminatory undertones right from the very beginning. Toward the end of the 19th century Congress ushered in a new wave of racist immigration laws, including the Page Law, enacted in 1875, which sought to keep Asian prostitutes from coming into the United States. Actually, it was used to ban all Chinese women. Then, in 1882, Congress reacted to the growing number of Chinese people coming to the U.S. by enacting the “Chinese Exclusion Act,” arguing that this population could not be assimilated. The act barred entry of any Chinese for 10 years, and it was made permanent in 1904. (It was later repealed in 1943, when China was assigned an entry quota of 105 immigrants per year).

their subjects or citizens, are one nation, invested with powers which belong to independent nations, the exercise of which can be invoked for the maintenance of its absolute independence and security throughout its entire territory.” See the Chinese Exclusion Case (*Chae Chan Ping v. United States*), 130 U.S. 581, 603, 604 (1889); see also *Fong Yue Ting v. United States*, 149 U.S. 698, 705 (1893); *The Japanese Immigrant Case (Yamataya v. Fisher)*, 189 U.S. 86 (1903); *United States ex rel. Turner v. Williams*, 194 U.S. 279 (1904); *Bugajewitz v. Adams*, 228 U.S. 585 (1913); *Hines v. Davidowitz*, 312 U.S. 52 (1941); *Kleindeist v. Mandel*, 408 U.S. 753 (1972), and *Galvan v. Press*, 347 U.S. 522, 530-531 (1954).

⁵ 1 Stat. 103 (1790). This law was expanded in 1870 so that persons of “African nativity and . . . descent” were entitled to be naturalized.

⁶ Act of June 25, 1798, 1 Stat. 570. The Act was part of the Alien and Sedition Laws and authorized the expulsion of any alien the President deemed dangerous.

⁷ As quoted in C. Stone Brown’s article “The History of Hate.” *DiversityInc*, April 2006, p.64. See also page 66 where Brown lists five of the most prominent anti-immigrant groups that were active during the 19th century (the Order of United Americans, United Sons of America, the Star Spangled Banner—which later became the Know-Nothing Party--, and, of course, the Ku Klux Klan.)

The 1907-08 “Gentlemen’s Agreement” barred the entry of Japanese and Koreans into the U.S.⁸ In 1917 Congress passed the “Immigration Act” over President Woodrow Wilson's veto. This legislation established a literacy test, which created the “Asiatic Barred Zone,” which made it virtually impossible for people to migrate from Asia to the U.S.

In 1921 the “Quota Act” (or the Johnson Act) set immigration quotas for the first time in U.S. history. The law established that a number equal to 3 percent of the foreign born population in the 1910 census (of admissible nationalities from Asia) would be allowed to come into the U.S. However, there was still no limit to immigrants coming from European countries. This was later amended, and in 1924, with strong support by President Calvin Coolidge, Congress enacted into law the “Immigration Act” (Johnson-Reid Act), a national origins quota formula which based the proportion of admissible immigrants on the breakdown of nationalities in the 1890 census, which, of course, was heavily weighed in favor of English and northern European ancestry.⁹ This law set an annual “national origin” ceiling of 154,227. (We must keep in mind that during the first 20 years of the 20th Century the U.S. experienced the largest European migration movement ever to take place in the country.) This national origins quota system was in effect until it was repealed in 1965.

After the 1924 Act, Congress sought to produce new legislation on immigration, and in 1952 it enacted the “Immigration and Nationality Act” (McCarran-Walter Act) over President Harry Truman’s veto. The President’s reasons for vetoing this bill are instructive for us today:

Today we are protecting ourselves as we were in 1924, against being flooded by immigrants from Eastern Europe. This is fantastic.... We do not need to be protected against immigrants from these countries. On the contrary we want to stretch out a helping hand, to save those who have managed to flee into Western Europe, to succor those who are brave enough to escape from barbarism, to welcome and restore them against the day when their countries will, as we hope, be free again...these are only a few examples of the absurdity, the cruelty of carrying over into this year of 1952 the isolationist limitations of our 1924 law. In no other realm of our national life are we so hampered and stultified by the dead hand of the past, as we are in this field of immigration.¹⁰

This legislation reaffirmed the basic provisions of the national origins quota system, and the annual ceiling remained 154,277. On the other hand, it abolished immigration and naturalization exclusions against Asians and allotted 100 visas for each Asian country. This legislation also instituted a system to give preference (within the national origins quotas) to foreigners with education or skills, as well as relatives.

Although immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean remained exempted from numerical limits during the 1950s, it did not stop the U.S. government from targeting exclusively Mexican nationals living in the southern States for deportation.

⁸ This “Agreement” was reached between President Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese government in order to reduce the growing hostilities against Japanese immigrants in California. For Roosevelt it was in the interest of the U.S. to maintain Japan as a partner in order to counter Russian’s expansion in Asia.

⁹ After signing this bill President Coolidge declared: “America must remain American.” As quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s article: “America’s Tradition of Fear” by Ruben Navarrette, Jr. (San Diego Union-Tribune), Sept. 27, 2006, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2006/09/27/EDG6PKDU331.DTL>

¹⁰ From Wikipedia: National Immigration Act 1952, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McCarran-Walter_Act.

In 1965, Congress came back again and passed the “Amendments to Immigration and Nationality Act,” which replaced the national origins system with a preference system designed to unite immigrant families and attract skilled immigrants to the United States. This legislation was a feeble response to the discriminatory, racist practices and policies that had dominated the U.S. immigration system, as Truman’s had warned.

This new law was another poor legislative attempt to respond to the effervescent civil rights movement of the 1960s. It sought to eliminate laws that were discriminatory in tone and effect.

The language used by the supporters of the legislation, which responded to the disinformation and fear expressed by the country in that period, was racist. Immigration Subcommittee chairman Senator Edward Kennedy summarized what the bill would not do: "First, our cities will not be flooded with a million immigrants annually. Under the proposed bill, the present level of immigration remains substantially the same ... Secondly, the ethnic mix will not be upset . . . Contrary to the charges in some quarters, [the bill] will not inundate America with immigrants from any one country or area, or the most populated and deprived nations of Africa and Asia . . ." ¹¹

Kennedy assured the country that its racial/ethnic mix, and thus, its white European-American dominance would not change. The country was assured that immigrants of color or from a specific country would not inundate America; nor would the country be overrun by immigrants from the most populated and deprived nations of Africa and Asia. The white majority was assured that immigration would not have a great impact over the racial and ethnic make up of America; so, of course the white majority and its privileges would be maintained.

The numeric changes in national immigration policy corresponded to the population of the U.S. at the beginning of the 20th Century. People believed that there could be very little change in the ethnic composition in America. For the white dominant population it was impossible to believe that their cultural hegemony was ever going to change.

However, things have indeed changed; today the majority of applicants for immigration visas come from Asia and Latin America rather than Europe. Nevertheless, the preference system continues to limit the number of immigration visas available each year.

In 1980 Congress responded to the refugee crisis with special legislation, passing the Refugee Act and thereby giving the United States its initial general policy governing the admission of refugees. This law established a separate admissions policy for refugees, eliminating the previous geographical and ideological criteria, and defined “refugee” according to United Nations norms. It abolished the seventh preference category for refugees, and it established a separate target ceiling for refugees at 50,000, while reducing the annual worldwide ceiling for immigrants to 270,000.

Subsequent legislation has continued to emerge in attempts to deal with the reality of so many people wanting to come to the United States by any means possible. In 1981 Congress created a Commission on Immigration, which issued a report with several recommendations. The “Report of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy,” led by the Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, recommended the following:

“We recommend closing the back door to undocumented, illegal migration, opening the front door a little more to accommodate legal migration in the interests of this country, defining our immigration goals clearly and providing a structure to implement them effectively, and

¹¹ See “Time to Rethink Immigration?” by Peter Brimelow, *National Review*, June 22, 1992 (Mr. Brimelow is Editor at [VDARE.com](http://www.vdare.com)) at http://www.vdare.com/pb/time_to_rethink.htm (this is an anti-immigrant web-site).

setting forth procedures which will lead to fair and efficient adjudication and administration of U.S. immigration laws.”

The Congressional response was quick. In 1986 it passed the “Immigration Reform and Control Act” (IRCA), which, unfortunately, did not address many of the recommendations of the “Select Commission,” except by trying to control and deter illegal immigration. This law provided amnesty and temporary resident status to all “illegal aliens” (a concept that we’ll address later) who had lived in the United States continuously since before January 1, 1982. It extended a separate, more lenient amnesty to immigrant farm workers, imposed sanctions on employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers, and increased inspection and enforcement of U.S. borders. Immigration deterrence and enforcement of border restrictions against people from Latin America was, and continues to be, the main component of this law until today.

Then again in 1990 Congress passed the “Immigration Act” (IMMACT), which modified and expanded the 1965 act. This new law increased significantly the total level of immigration to 700,000, and increased available visas by 40 percent. The act retained family reunification as the major entry path, while more than doubling employment-related immigration. The law also provided for the admission of immigrants from “underrepresented” countries to increase the diversity of the immigrant flow. Of course, the increased level of immigration (700,000) was intended mostly to bring skilled workers into the U.S., workers that the U.S. needs for its fast growing technological, scientific, and medical industries.

Finally, in 1996 Congress passed, and President William J. Clinton signed into law, Welfare Reform or, as it is generally known, the “Work Opportunity and Personal Responsibility Act of 1996.” Most of the cuts in this federally funded program came in the assistance available to documented immigrants who, until 1996, had qualified for help.

Later in 1996, Congress approved additional changes to the existing immigration laws, which expanded the limitations immigrants would have to overcome if they were in need of social services. The “Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996” (Pub L. 104-208), was enacted on September 30, 1996. In addition, this law sought to make it even harder for immigrants to come into the U.S. by conditioning their entry to their sponsor’s financial abilities. This is not a problem if the sponsor is a corporation, but in the case of relatives it became a heavy burden. This law also authorized increases in criminal penalties for immigration-related offenses, authorized increases in enforcement personnel, enhanced enforcement authority, and expedited removal of undocumented immigrants.¹²

Today there are several Congressional proposals that seek to address immigration issues. Of these, none alone will solve the problems that cause people to risk their lives to come into the United States, be it that they come through the immigration process established by law, or by other unconventional means.

As in the past, the driving forces behind legislation on immigration are fear, prejudice, disinformation, and racism. Only a few members of Congress, it seems, want to provide serious solutions to the political and economic crises that force people to leave their countries and migrate to the United States. Why are people willing to risk their lives and families to come here, only to become unwanted strangers in a foreign land? Instead of a clear response to address the reality of migration, our Congressional leadership and the White House have not presented any real solutions. Instead, we hear about state, county and local governments enacting anti-

¹² U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Services, Washington, DC, “Fact Sheet,” 3/24/97, <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/publicaffairs/factsheets/948.htm>.

immigration laws in their attempts to evict and disperse undocumented immigrants without considering the detrimental impact this will have on their communities.

The negation of Latino humanity and self-worth through the legislative system is yet another example of how social and political forces in America continue to sanction their privilege in order to hold power, and with their power to bring about death.

History of Racism on Immigrants

When we look at the history of American ethnic relations, we are appalled when we read of the infamous Jim Crow Laws that were enacted during the end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Today we continue to see the vestiges of Jim Crow laws still with us, haunting us with unresolved prejudice and discrimination practices. Today a new wave of Jim Crow-like immigration laws are emerging around the country. These laws—like the ones passed by state legislatures in Georgia,¹³ Arizona,¹⁴ Colorado,¹⁵ North Carolina,¹⁶ and California,¹⁷ as well as the U.S. Congress—bring back to life the persecution and hostility that the dominant population executes upon a vulnerable part of our population, especially immigrant and undocumented persons coming from Latin America. This situation is sustained by people who because of hate, prejudice, fear, or ignorance inflict pain and suffering upon the powerless and weak.

Those who hold power in our society inflict pain upon their immigrant brothers and sisters, despite their diligence in working hard to support their families, their payment of taxes and their contributions to their communities, because these immigrants are strangers, and thus, outsiders. Many are dark-skinned, foreign-speaking with accented English at best and different in appearance, perhaps resembling their aboriginal ancestors. They have different cultural experiences, religious convictions, tastes in food and cultural values. They might come from non-western countries, and they might not understand how American democracy operates.

As in the past, therefore, nativists¹⁸ and racists have taken the lead in opposing and seeking to prevent immigrants from coming into the U.S. Nativists believe that immigrants, whether documented or undocumented, have always created havoc in America. To them, the fact that immigrants want to continue using their languages is a clear sign that they do not want to

¹³ “GOP says no benefits for illegal immigrants,” by Diane Wagner. *The Cedartown Standard*, October 25, 2005.

¹⁴ “The Fight over Immigration is a Fight over Identity: Border War,” by John B. Judis. *The New Republic Online* (<https://ssl.tnr.com/p/docsub.mhtml?i=20060116&s=judis011606>)

¹⁵ “Group starts campaign to bar some services to illegal immigrants,” by Jon Sarche. *The Associated Press*, Thursday, January 05, 2006 (<http://www.heraldextra.com/content/view/155115/4/>)

¹⁶ “A victory in North Carolina! 4 New immigration laws!” By William Gheen. Posted on Friday, July 28 @ 15:59:41 UTC (<http://www.alipac.us/article1391.html>).

¹⁷ “California GOP blasts plan to cover kids of illegal immigrants,” by Ed Mendel. *Union Tribune*, June 13, 2006.

¹⁸ In the United States “nativism appeared in the late 1790s in reaction to an influx of political refugees from France and Ireland. After passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 it receded. Nativism first gained a name and affected politics in mid-19th century United States because of the large inflows of immigrants from cultures that were markedly different from the existing Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. Thus, nativists objected primarily to Roman Catholics (especially Irish American) because of their loyalty to Rome. Nativist movements included the American Party of the mid-19th Century (formed by members of the Know-Nothing movement), the Immigration Reduction League of the early 20th Century, and the anti-Asian movements in the West, resulting in the Chinese Exclusion Act and the so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement” aimed at the Japanese” (**Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia**, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nativism>).

It is important to highlight that for Nativists the culture, and American way of life, to which everyone is supposed to assimilate is the white-dominant-culture. Notwithstanding, even though that culture will be defined by regions, given the fact that there is no uniform white culture in the U.S., except for the power and privilege that they hold in common.

assimilate and become like “us” (that is to say, embracing the white-dominant culture¹⁹). At least, that is the argument.

Groups with a nativist orientation argue that immigrants have taken jobs that would have been available to native born citizens. According to this movement, immigrants have impacted our communities’ sense of unity and our national pride; their consumption levels have depleted the scarce resources made available for the native born; they have abused welfare programs and received benefits for which they do not qualify. Immigrants have increased overpopulation, overrunning communities and replacing the majority indigenous culture with their own, while threatening to further mix the “races.”²⁰ They have burdened the already weak health care system, the run-down schools and educational system, and the limited housing available.

Such views from the past are re-emerging in today’s debate on immigration. Many nativists (as well as racists) support the beliefs of national nativists leader Erin Anderson²¹. Mrs. Anderson’s believes that “Middle Eastern terrorists routinely attend special schools in Latin America where they learn to speak Spanish and act like Latino immigrants in preparation for sneaking into the United States.” As if that was not bad enough, she claims, “Illegal aliens have brought a leprosy epidemic to an area near Boston. Miami, Houston and Los Angeles are no longer safe because the undocumented donate blood that has been tainted with a deadly disease from south of the border. Mexican pedophiles, terrified by the brutality of their own country’s law enforcement officials, are flooding into this country in huge numbers.” As if this was not enough she assures her frightened audiences that “the Mexican government is implicated ‘up to their eyeballs.’”²²

A terrifying example of one of these leaders is Jim Chase. When Mr. Chase launched the California Minutemen (recently renamed California Border Watch), Chase put out a call on the Internet for “all those who do not want their families murdered by Al Qaeda, illegal migrants, colonizing illegal aliens, illegal alien felons, alien barbarians, Ninja-dressed drug smugglers,” along with those who opposed “cowardly Aztlan punks and Che Guevara pink-pantied wimps lower than whale dung who should be fed to the chupacabra [a Latin American mythological monster like Big Foot].” Making ready to patrol the border, he asked his volunteers to bring “baseball bats, stun guns and machetes” and suggested that they could carry assault rifles and shotguns.²³

Clearly things do not stop there. Recently a member of Congress estimated that immigrants were committing genocide against American citizens²⁴. Congressman Steve King, 5th Congressional District of Iowa, stated what would be the consequences for the U.S. of “A Day

¹⁹ Oddly, this embrace, which has taken place throughout the history of this country by African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and other groups, has not brought any significant benefit to these communities. For these communities America’s history of assimilation is a history of racism.

²⁰ Visit the National Vanguard at: <http://www.nationalvanguard.org/story.php?id=7938>.

²¹ For her analysis of the immigration issue read: “The Open Borders Lobby and the Nation’s Security After 9/11,” By William Hawkins and Erin Anderson. *FrontPageMagazine.com*, January 21, 2004.

²² See the Southern Poverty Law Center publication *Intelligent Report*, “The Nativists,” p. 3. <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?pid=966>

²³ Ibid. p. 5. See also Americans for Legal Immigration PAC at <http://www.alipac.us/index.php>, for a powerful exposition.

²⁴ “Comparing the Statistics” (House of Representatives - May 03, 2006), speech by Congressman Steve King (R-IO). Among his many remarks he stated that “criminal aliens” are contributing to the social degradation of the U.S. “Now, that means then that criminal aliens are committing 28 percent of the crimes in the United States. And so that means 28 percent of the murders, 28 percent of the rapes, 28 percent of the violence and the assaults and battery, first- and second-degree murder and also manslaughter attacks are committed by criminal aliens.” (http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ia05_king/sp_20060503_stats.html). See also, “Why Immigrants Kill,” by Sam Francis, November 29, 2004 (http://www.vdare.com/francis/041129_kill.htm)

Without an Immigrant” (referring to a May 2006 immigrant demonstration): “No one to smuggle across our southern border the heroin, marijuana, cocaine, and methamphetamines that plague the United States, reducing the U.S. supply of meth that day by 80%.” He continued:

*The lives of 12 U.S. citizens would be saved who otherwise die violent deaths at the hands of murderous illegal aliens each day. Another 13 Americans would survive who are otherwise killed each day by uninsured drunk driving illegals. Our hospital emergency rooms would not be flooded with everything from gunshot wounds, to **anchor** babies, to imported diseases, to hangnails, giving American citizens the day off from standing in line behind illegals. Eight American children would not suffer the horror as a victim of a sex crime.*²⁵

Therefore, it is within this context of exclusion and racism that the expression “illegal alien”²⁶ has taken hold in American society. Nowhere in our past immigration history has any group been labeled “illegal aliens,” or “illegal immigrant,” or the “illegals.” These phrases are intended to mean the same and were necessary to support psychologically and ideologically the dehumanization of immigrants, thus justifying their persecution, exploitation, and oppression.

The way these expressions have been framed by nativist and racist groups represents a double burden in the lives of immigrants all over this country. Immigration is not a U.S. phenomenon, but the use of the term “illegal aliens” is; nowhere else in the world are immigrants addressed in this fashion.

When we refer to a person as an “illegal alien,” it carries unfair and offensive burdens that elicits psychological and emotional reactions. First, something illegal indicates a criminal act (a point stressed by Rep. King’s use of the expression “illegal criminals”). The person has violated some kind of agreed upon rule, which set him or her out of balance with good, decent, and law-abiding people. We must highlight here that this expression is not a neutral term used just to illustrate the condition of certain individuals in our society. We do not refer to people in prison as “illegals,” even though they are criminals. We do not call a business executive who cheats on his or her tax return an “illegal business executive,” even when we know that he or she was trying to commit fraud.²⁷ Nor do we call people who violate traffic laws “illegal drivers.” Even when people drive without a license and are caught, we do not call them “illegal drivers.” We simply refer to them as driving without a license. By the same token, people who come into the United States illegally commit an immigration violation, not a criminal act.²⁸ Therefore, an undocumented immigrant who is apprehended committing this violation the first time will be returned home, not sent to jail.²⁹

²⁵ Ibid. (http://www.house.gov/apps/list/speech/ia05_king/sp_20060503_stats.html). See also a wonderful article on Congressman King’s comments, in “Bursting the Bubble: Taking on a congressman full of hate,” by Dilana Yarbrough '06. **Scarlet and Black**, Volume 122, Number 3, September 16, 2005 (http://www.grinnell.edu/sandb/archives/Volume_122/Number_3/Opinion/002.html).

²⁶ Perhaps the expression “illegitimate” child comes closer to the negative implications of the expression “illegals.” However, very seldom would a child in America be described as “illegitimate,” and it does not carry the same emotional negative implications.

²⁷ Enron and Worldcom executives committed criminal acts that have caused thousands of people to lose their pensions and financial security for the future. The criminal acts of these executives have impacted the lives of millions of U.S. workers but non of them is called an “illegal.”

²⁸ This understanding applies to first-time offenders. Those who come into the U.S. illegally a second time can be charged as felons. First-time offenders are sent back home; second offenses can lead to prison time.

²⁹ After changes in immigration law, a second illegal entry into the U.S. would be considered a misdemeanor under our criminal code; but it does not make the person “illegal.”

On the other hand, people who hire undocumented workers violate labor laws and will receive a fine, but they are not referred to as “illegal employers.” Most times, these employers will not be charged with a crime even though theirs is actually a chargeable offense.

Second, the term “alien” in popular culture suggests that the person or persons so described are nonhuman, that they are invaders from some foreign, perhaps extraterrestrial place.

By framing the debate in this fashion, we provide a complete openness for U.S. citizens to jump on the bandwagon and defend the homeland from “alien” forces that are invading us, “raping” our women and children, “murdering” our elderly, bringing exotic diseases, trying to retake the southwest part of the U.S. and return it to Mexico, and, undoubtedly, “harboring” terrorists whose only desire is to kill peace loving Americans³⁰. As George Lakoff so eloquently put it.

Immigrants who cross outside of legal channels, though, are committing offenses of a much different nature than the prototypical criminal. Their intent is not to cause harm or to steal. More accurately, they are committing victimless technical offenses, which we normally consider “violations.” By invoking the illegal frame, the severity of their offenses is inflated. The illegal frame – particularly “illegal alien” – dehumanizes. It blocks the question of why people are coming to the U.S., oftentimes at great personal risk. What services do they provide when they are here? Why do they feel it necessary to avoid legal channels? It boils the entire debate down to questions of legality³¹.

The fact is that “illegal aliens” is an expression that defines the debate clearly on behalf of those who sought to close our borders even before the horrible events of September 11, 2001. This compound of hatred is the ultimate poison that immigrants must continue to absorb in order to survive in the U.S.

As in the past, this segment of the population will be the scapegoat for all the ills affecting U.S. society, as we already hear in news reports.³² For many folks, this community must be reduced in size, they must be prevented from accessing any assistance from the government, and their civil and human rights do not need to be respected.

The facts about immigration are clear: approximately 1 million immigrants per year come into the U.S.; of those about 70 percent come to the U.S. through proper channels³³. In fact, four out of ten undocumented immigrants entered the U.S. with student, tourist, business, or other types of visas.

³⁰ What many people know, although it is seldom highlighted by the media and government officials, is that in the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, hundreds of those killed were immigrants and among them many were undocumented workers. See ACLU Testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims titled: "Immigration Enforcement Since September 11, 2001" (5/8/2003)--
<http://www.aclu.org/safefree/general/17298leg20030508.html>. Also Jeremy Johnson's article: Crisis facing immigrant workers in New York exacerbated by attacks (23 October 2001)--www.wsws.org

³¹ “The Framing of Immigration,” by George Lakoff and Sam Ferguson, *The Rockridge Institute 2006* (<http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org/research/rockridge/immigration>).

³² See the documents posted in Carrying Capacity Network (<http://www.carryingcapacity.org/index.html>). Also Federation for American Immigration Reform's web-site:
http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=iic_immigrationissuecentersf134.

³³ There are different programs through which people can come into the U.S. Within each category there may be “preference levels” and quotas. In addition, once an applicant satisfies the requirement for a visa, they may also have to qualify under a per-country quota system. If the country's quota is filled, they are put on the waiting list, which in many occasions is several years long. Various specific visa programs then address the inequities of this situations (i.e. K visas), although not completely.

Furthermore, more than 75 percent of immigrants residing in the U.S. for forty years were naturalized. More than 61 percent will own their home within 20 years of living here. Within 10 years of living in the U.S., 75 percent will speak English well or very well; only 2 percent do not speak any English, and virtually all their children are proficient.

Most immigrants come into the country looking for a better life and the opportunity to earn enough money to provide basic necessities for those they left behind. Many undocumented immigrants come to our country out of desperation, with mothers even leaving their children behind, thinking that by coming here they may provide more opportunities for their children.

Many immigrants come in search of work opportunities, since in their home countries possibilities are very limited or nonexistent –due to endemic poverty, natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, political unrest, or civil wars.

There is no doubt that undocumented immigrants have had a significant impact on the daily life of middle-class America. They are filling the employment gaps present in our society, cleaning our hotel rooms, maintaining our lawns and pools, driving taxis, laboring in construction, working in the growing technological, scientific and banking industries, and doing other jobs where affordable labor is needed.

Most economic experts who have studied the relationship between immigration and U.S. employment have reported that immigrants create more jobs than they fill. They do this by forming new businesses, raising the productivity of already established businesses, investing capital and spending dollars on consumer goods. Studies by the Rand Corporation, Council of Economic Advisors, the National Research Council and the Urban Institute all came to the conclusion that, by-in-large, immigrants (documented or not) do not have a negative effect on the earnings and the employment opportunities of native-born Americans.³⁴

Moreover, the Urban Institute has concluded that immigrants actually generate significantly more in tax revenues than they receive in services. This is because undocumented workers, despite their ineligibility for most federal benefits, frequently have Social Security and income taxes withheld from their paychecks. In fact, immigrants pay substantially more in taxes every year than they receive in social benefits. In addition, following the 1996 immigration laws, documented immigrants were barred from receiving most government benefits until they met very steep requirements.

In addition, the protection of the rights of immigrants serves to guard the rights of all workers. When undocumented immigrants are subjected to low wages and dangerous and unjust working conditions, it is easier for employers to impose the same treatment on documented workers. This is why it is fundamental that immigrants' labor and civil rights be protected. The fact of the matter is that immigrants do contribute to national and states' economies³⁵ more than anti-immigrants want to admit³⁶.

Contrary to popular belief, immigrant families are doing what immigrants have always done – slowly and sometimes painfully adapting to the cultural norms of the country they have decided to call home. New immigrants adopt the basic concepts of American life: equality under

³⁴ See the ACLU's web-page at www.aclu.org/library/pbp20.html. See also February 2002, Does Border Enforcement Protect U.S. Workers from Illegal Immigration? By Gordon H. Hanson, Raymond Robertson, and Antonio Spilimbergo. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 84, No. 1, Pages 73-92, Posted Online March 13, 2006.

³⁵ "North Carolina's Hispanic immigrants contribute more than \$9 billion to economy, cost state budget net \$102 per Hispanic resident, new study shows," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, News Release, Jan. 3, 2006 -- No. 1. The full report may be downloaded online at www.kenaninstitute.unc.edu.

³⁶ For an in-depth description of facts versus myths see "Myths and Facts in the Immigration Debate," AILA Backgrounder. American Immigration Lawyers Association, 918 F Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20004-1400, 202.216.2400 (<http://www.aila.org>).

the law, fair play, due process, and economic opportunity. American culture is constantly changing, adapting to immigrants as they adapt to it.

In the Jim Crow era, however, federal and state laws were created to maintain the descendants of slaves in “their place” (in the back of the bus, or in their segregated communities and urban ghettos, working for nothing, and being exploited by a system of racism that bended to benefit the U.S.’s white population). Laws were created to protect the unity of the white population against the perceived threat of slave descendants’ rise to power. These laws sought to maintain the white majority, and the white political, social, and economic hegemony.

This story of racism that we saw during Jim Crow is now re-emerging with the purpose of keeping Latinos, and immigrants in general, in “their place.” We are looking at a new “Jim Crow” era, where Latinos are the target of the U.S.’s white population’s fears and prejudices.

Even our churches are participating in this new segregation and exclusion. Today we find many United Methodist churches and annual (regional) conferences not wanting or feeling free to hire undocumented workers to work in their ministries even if they are members of their churches. Their offerings will be received, their contributions will go to benefit our children and our ministries, but they cannot receive the same benefits, nor could they respond to God’s call to be in active ministry because of their immigration status.³⁷ Undocumented Christians are part of our churches, but they are barred from responding to God’s call to ordained ministry because they came to this country without proper authorization.

By our church’s acquiescence to the state, we are creating in our midst a second-class church membership, one church for the immigrant, documented or not, and the church for all others. We have churches where most of the membership, if not all, are undocumented, and they cannot have representatives in the church’s structure, their leadership is not recognized, and their pastors could not be ordained nor serve as God has called them because they are undocumented. This behavior is immoral and unacceptable for the church of God.

Why Are Immigrants Coming?

The history of human migration presents us with myriad of reasons for why people are coming in great numbers from Latin America to the U.S. They are the same reasons why Europeans and others came to this continent over the past three centuries. People come seeking answers to grave needs, seeking to escape from famine, despair, and political and religious persecution, seeking employment and better lives for themselves and their children.

The impact of the global economy, especially the North American and Central American free trade agreements (NAFTA and CAFTA) has negatively impacted on Latin America’s economies, forcing thousands upon thousands of people to leave their home countries in order to survive and hopefully thrive abroad. On one hand, these commercial agreements have benefited the emerging middle and upper classes in Latin American countries who are party to the treaties, providing them with higher standards of living. On the other hand, the masses of impoverished, small-scale farmers and peasant populations in these same countries have become ever poorer.

Since NAFTA came into effect, its drastic –and mostly negative– impact has been felt throughout the continent. The impact of this trade agreement has been largely responsible for the

³⁷ A painful example of this injustice is the scholarships that our membership supports in order to help our students to attend college. The money for these scholarships is placed in our offering plates by members (citizens and undocumented alike), but are completely out of reach to our undocumented United Methodist children (see the GBHEM requirements for applicants).

mass migration we have experienced in the U.S. in the last 10 years.³⁸ These trade agreements alone do not explain why thousands of people from around the world (not just Latin America) come to the U.S. The search for the dream of a better life, a way out of extreme, abject poverty and exploitation are other reasons why people are willing to risk their lives and those of their children in order to cross borders. They come to the realization that it is better to suffer and possibly die trying to realize the dream of a better life than to die slowly without any hope by staying at home.

Immigrants leave their homes also to escape different forms of political and religious persecution. They are forced to leave to escape their countries' constant turmoil and civil wars, thus joining the ranks of thousands of people around the world who are displaced. And every year hundreds of thousands more are added to the numbers of this displaced population due to ecological disasters.

People are coming into the U.S. for a variety of reasons. But they all share a common dream, that of a better life for their families and for themselves.

It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Our Biblical Heritage

The message of God registered throughout the biblical corpus compels us to reject any political or ideological agenda where people are excluded because of their immigration status, place of origin, language, gender, or any other socio-economic or political characteristics. Our call for inclusion is not only in the realm of the Church, but also in the social order because people of faith do not live in a vacuum. We are called to welcome the stranger who is in our midst. We are called to receive all into God's family. Jesus makes it very clear in his sermon on the judgment day:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for... For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Matthew 25:34-40, NIV)

Paul reminds us, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs

³⁸ See *Roots of Migration*, American Friends Service Committee: <http://www.afsc.org/immigrants-rights/learn/roots.htm>. Also, *More Losers Than Winners From WTO's Free Trade*, Third World Network: <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/loosers.htm>.

according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28-29 --NIV)³⁹. Clearly, for those of us living in this new dispensation, we must remember that we “were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.” But now in Christ Jesus we have been “brought near through the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:12-13.) The biblical witness shows us that those whom society and individuals reject have become God’s very own.

Paul continues to help us understand that the God we serve already moved us closer to him and his desire for the human family to be united. According to Paul, the wall that divided and separated us has been smashed down; it has been abolished, and reconciliation of differences has been set in its place.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people... (Ephesians 2:14-16, 19)

This is the message of reconciliation with God, but it is also the message of reconciliation with one another. God has brought down all distinctions, all walls of separation and division. God makes no distinctions between people; neither should we (Leviticus 19:15; James 2:1-3). Therefore, we are called to imitate God (Matthew 5:48), to be holy as God is Holy (Lev.19:2; I Peter 1: 15-16) to welcome others as God welcomes us. As the Apostle Paul urges us, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2.)

Therefore, according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must show a different way of life because we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, called out of darkness into God’s wonderful light (I Peter 2:9-10). We are not God’s chosen people because our skin pigmentation is white, black, brown, yellow, red or mixed, or because some are more intelligent than others. We are God’s chosen people because God chose us; the way we are to be in God’s presence is inclusive and embracing. As Paul says in I Corinthians 13 regarding those who are true lovers of Christ, those who love do “not delight in evil but rejoice with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (6-7).

As we have been called to imitate Christ, to be in the image of God, we are called to live our faith in solidarity with those who have been impoverished, imprisoned, oppressed, as well as the orphan, the widow, and the stranger who lives in our midst.

This expression of God’s solidarity is remarkably present in the ancient Christian tradition of hospitality. “The hospitality of Jesus,” says Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, “as depicted in the

³⁹ Let us keep in mind that for the Apostle Paul there was no need to include an issue such as race on this list because for him, as for all the ancient world, we were all descendents of a common ancestor (Adam and Eve). So there is no room for racial superiority. In this period, however, we might be able to speak of ethnic superiority based on military hegemony. However, this was not based on our present understanding of the concept “race,” which really begins to flourish in the 16th and 17th centuries, until it finds its greater exposition during one of the most important periods of human history: The Enlightenment. It is in this period that “race,” as a social construct for domination, finds its more cohesive ideological and philosophical proponents. See an assortment of articles in “Race: The Power of an Illusion” at http://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background.htm. Also **Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader**, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997.

Gospel, increased in inverse relationship to the religious and social acceptability of the persons being welcomed. Those most welcomed by him were often those most rejected by others.”⁴⁰

The strangers, or foreigners, are those who sojourn amongst us; they are the outsiders whom we are called to welcome. It is for these outsiders that we must provide according to their need, as God provides for us according to our needs. This is radical hospitality. As Christiene Pohl powerfully states:

*For most of the history of the church, hospitality was understood to encompass physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of human existence and relationships. It meant response to the physical needs of strangers for food, shelter and protection, but also a recognition of their worth and common humanity.*⁴¹

This Christian tradition of hospitality we see everywhere in the Hebrew and Christian testaments. From Genesis 1, we have God making room in Godself to have us share in God’s presence and majesty. In Genesis 2, we have God attentive to the needs of the first humans, welcoming them to the garden and making them responsible for it.

Our God made a covenant with Noah, with Abraham, with Hagar (the slave), with Israel (Jacob), with the people of Israel (a band of slaves) in Sinai. In all these cases God is the one approaching and making the invitation for people to come into God’s fold. There are many other examples in the Bible of God’s hospitality and of God’s servants’ hospitality (which are by nature redemptive)⁴².

This tradition of God’s radical hospitality has been also part of The United Methodist Church’s vision to be an embracing and inclusive community of hospitality. This is what our church expressed so powerfully in resolution 265, “Immigrants and Refugees: To Love the Sojourner”:

*The Bible is full of stories of sojourners, strangers without homes, whom God called people to protect. The Israelites were themselves sojourners for forty years after the exodus from Egypt, as they sought the Promised Land. God did not let the Israelites forget that they had been without a homeland for such a long time; the ethic of welcoming the sojourner was woven into the very fabric of the Israelite confederacy. It was more than an ethic, it was a command of God. "Do not mistreat or oppress a stranger; you know how it feels to be a stranger, because you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 23:9, Revised Standard Version, adapted).*⁴³

Similar examples are found in the Christian Testament⁴⁴. For God so loved the world that he became one of us, a humble servant, in order to show God’s amazing love and embracing of the human race (John 3:16; Philippians 2:5-11). No one has greater love than this, a love that is willing to sacrifice one’s own life for the other (John 15:13). As people of faith, our call to welcome the stranger is matched with James words to the early disciples: “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins” (4: 17).

⁴⁰ Printed in the Northern Illinois Conference's weekly newspaper *The United Methodist Reporter*. August 2006 (you can acquire a copy in the NIL Conference web site: <http://www.gbgm-umc.org/NILLCONF/>).

⁴¹ See her book, **Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition**. Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1999. p. 6.

⁴² See Genesis 15 and 17; Exodus 3:7-8; Micah 7:20; Jonah; Romans 15:8.

⁴³ **The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church 2004**, Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2004.

⁴⁴ See Luke 9:1-10; 10:38; 11:37-38; Acts 16:15; I Tim. 1:16; 3 John 1:5-8, and more.

Clearly, as God in Christ came to be among us to reconcile the world to himself, so should we be engaged in a ministry that accepts no barriers and makes no distinction between one human being and another (II Corinthians 5:18-20).

Throughout the scriptural corpus we find a God who calls us and the societies in which we live to be open and inclusive, to be truly hospitable to the stranger and to treat the stranger as a citizen.⁴⁵

*And, as an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit,
so a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit.*

*As the heart therefore of a believer,
so likewise his life, is thoroughly conformed
to the rule of God's commandments...*

Sermon 12, "The Witness of our Own Spirit," by John Wesley

Our Wesleyan Heritage

As one can see from the Scriptures, God is the one who comes to us. From the moment of the Fall to the moment of the cross, God is the one who continues to seek us out. This Biblical tradition of radical hospitality is expressed in our Wesleyan tradition in the doctrine of prevenient grace. God is constantly seeking us out, calling us to be part of God's inclusive and hospitable community where there is no room for separation and strangeness, where all creation is welcomed.

This is why one of the greatest sources of radical hospitality found in the Wesleyan movement is found in the movement's hymnody. One of Charles Wesley's more popular hymns, written in 1747, illustrates the inclusive character of the early Methodist societies. Wesley reminds us of God's open and inclusive character:

*Come, sinners, to the Gospel feast;
Let every soul be Jesus' guest.
Ye need not one be left behind,
For God hath bid all humankind.*

The first stanza tells us that sinners are called to come to the table! It is not an invitation to the perfect Christian. It is a call to everyone because God has "bid all humankind."

*Sent by my Lord, on you I call;
The invitation is to all.
Come, all the world! Come, sinner, thou!
All things in Christ are ready now.*

Here we find that the invitation is to all, we have been sent to call everyone whether they are good or bad, citizen or resident, documented or undocumented, we are all welcomed to God's table, we are all welcome in God's community.

*His love is mighty to compel;
His conquering love consent to feel,*

⁴⁵“The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 19:34). See also Lev. 24:22; 25:35-38; Deut. 1:16; Jer. 22:3; Matt. 25:31-46, and others.

*Yield to His love's resistless power,
And fight against your God no more.*⁴⁶

Let us all accept God's love, resist him not, and we will enjoy his love and mercy for all.

Indeed, the invitation is never thoughtless. God makes no distinction between documented, undocumented, or citizens. Everyone is welcome to come to the table. Every member of the human race is welcomed in the family. In this hymn the immigration status of the person is not what is important; he or she is welcomed into the family. Yet, this has connotations for our social relations as well. God does not tolerate discrimination of human beings because of their status in society, be they rich or poor, or because of their legal status in our midst (citizen or not). So, why should we?

We believe that as United Methodists, and for society at large, we must reclaim our heritage; that is to say, we must reclaim the Wesleyan emphasis on Christian perfection in order to address the hate and oppression committed against people of different ethnic groups, especially against immigrants, which is the focus of this statement. That is to say, no one who claims to be moving on to perfection can adopt an attitude of hate or racism against another human being. If we are all part of God's loved world (John 3:16), how could Christ's sacrifice work on us?

In order to make disciples of Jesus Christ from a perspective of racial justice, our people must understand the implications of holy living. For John Wesley, holy living was simply: "Loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love. ('It is 'perfect love.' (1 John 4:18.)"

To fully become disciples of Jesus Christ, we must understand the implications and the demands of Christian Perfection in the Wesleyan tradition. Perfection, Wesley believed:

*It is the complying with that kind command, "My son, give me thy heart." It is "loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind." This is the sum of Christian perfection: It is **all comprised in that one word, Love**. The first branch of it is the love of God: And as he that loves God loves his brother also, **it is inseparably connected** with the second: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:" Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets:" **These contain the whole of Christian perfection.**⁴⁷*

Indeed, this journey into perfection is what Christian discipleship is all about. It is an ongoing process through which we gain greater maturity as we come to understand God's will for our lives, and we come to live according to God's will. Therefore, it is imperative that we engage our folks in our churches so that they may come to understand what God requires of them (Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Micah 6:8; Matthew 23:23). We must train our folks in how to live up to the expectations of the gospel as they grow in grace.

⁴⁶ Charles Wesley, *Hymns for Those That Seek and Those That Have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ*, 1747, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/c/o/comsinrs.htm>. See also in our UM Hymn Book, hymns #57 O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing; 438 Forth in Thy Name, O Lord; 550 Chris, from Whom All Blessings Flow; 553 And Are We Yet Alive; and many more. These are hymns that declared God's constant invitation and our personal response to live obediently.

⁴⁷ John Wesley's *Sermons on Several Occasions*. Sermon 76, "On Christian Perfection," §1, ¶4 (**bold is mine**).

Christian perfection--that is to say, love of God and our fellow human beings--if lived out, would not allow the believer (disciple) to entertain hate and exclusivity; it would not allow the believer to create and/or sustain walls that separate us.

People who live a holy life cannot have room in their hearts to harbor hate toward others, or to accept hate as an acceptable behavior in the church or in society. Clearly, those who desire to be disciples must act and live according to a different logic: not the logic of hate and exclusion, but the logic of hospitality, the logic of God's Household. As it is stated in the "General Rules of Our United Societies:"

*There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies: "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul **it will be shown by its fruits**. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,*

*First: **By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind...***

*Second: **By doing good; by being in every kind merciful** after their power; as they have opportunity, **doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:...***

*Third: **By attending upon all the ordinances of God,...***⁴⁸

Racial justice in American Methodism is not just an important issue, but is at the heart of our ministry; it is an integral part of our ministry of reconciliation. God sides with the oppressed and destitute, not with the wealthy and powerful; God takes the side of the immigrant who is the stranger, the alien, the "illegal" and despised in our land. To embrace this logic is to embrace the presence of God that is present in every living soul over the face of the earth. As people of the journey we must accept that God is present and acting in every human being, and we must accept that every human being is a reflection of God's image (Genesis 1:26).

This is not new information. On the contrary, this is about reviving and renewing our commitment to live that life of holiness to which we have all been called.

Another powerful quote from Wesley summarizes our heritage of commitment to the stranger:

*We "charge" you, therefore, "who are rich in this world," as having authority from our great Lord and Master, to be habitually doing good, to live in a course of good works. ... We charge you to "be rich in good works;" as you have much, to give plenteously. "Freely ye have received; freely give;" so as to lay up no treasure but in heaven. Be ye "ready to distribute" to everyone according to his necessity. Disperse abroad, give to the poor: deal your bread to the hungry. Cover the naked with a garment, **entertain the stranger**, carry or send relief to them that are in prison. Heal the sick, not by miracle, but through the blessing of God upon your seasonable support. Let the blessing of him that was ready to perish through pining want come upon thee. Defend the oppressed, plead the cause of the fatherless, and make the widow's heart sing for joy. (Sermons on Several Occasions, 1771. Sermon 28, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount." Discourse 8).*

Genuine hospitality ultimately receives the most precious gift the sojourner brings to the host: fulfillment in actualizing the capacity to

⁴⁸ **The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2004.** The United Methodist Publishing House. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004. ¶ 103. Section3—Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules. General Rules of our United Societies.

love as God loves. In their quest for abundant life, the sojourners bring to those who will receive it no other gift than the Christ.

“On Undocumented Migration: To Love the Sojourner.

A Statement of Concern to United Methodists in the United States of America, from the United Methodist Council of Bishops,” 1988.

Our Response as People of Faith

As disciples of Christ, there is only one thing that we can do in response of God’s call to be an inclusive and hospitable church, a holy Church. Neither class, nor ethnic background, nor gender, nor immigration status can be used as impediments to opening our lives, our churches, and our society to the stranger who dwells in our midst. For disciples of Christ, hospitality to immigrants, including the undocumented, is not merely a political issue, but rather, a fundamental human and moral issue.

We bring into the undocumented immigration debate our faith, our moral principles and our long experience of working with the immigrant community. Throughout decades, as immigrants have arrived in our country, our communities, and our churches, they have brought – and continue to bring-- new life into our midst. Immigrants are not numbers to us; they are our brothers and sisters. They are our parents and grandparents, our lay leaders and pastors, our husbands and wives, aunts and uncles. They are a wonderful part of God’s marvelous tapestry of life: the human family.

The General Conference of The United Methodist has called us to take action in support of our immigrant brothers and sisters. In the Book of Resolutions the church has stated:

*In a time when our nation and world are desperate for peace, security and community, people of faith and good will are needed to encourage leadership at home and abroad and, especially, in our churches; and to have the courage to speak up for the newly vulnerable people put at risk in the rush to provide for our own safety. We must remember that God's household is bigger than our own.*⁴⁹

And, finally:

*[W]e call upon United Methodists to practice hospitality and express our commitment to an inclusive church and society through all our ministries in the spirit of our biblical tradition...*⁵⁰

As the General Commission on Religion and Race, we call on our Methodist family to take seriously the challenge to advocate for justice and inclusiveness and against racism and nativism. We urge all United Methodists to ask Congress repeatedly to pass a comprehensive immigration reform that includes the following:

1. A pathway to citizenship for the millions of immigrants already present in the United States--indeed, a pathway with minimal steps so that all undocumented migrants might have the opportunity to become citizens of the United States.
2. Reunification of families separated by migration, detainment or deportation.
3. Protection for the rights of migrant workers, offering them safe, orderly and legal avenues to enter this country.

⁴⁹ **The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2004.** Resolution #265, “Immigrants and Refugees: To Love the Sojourner” (*Italics are mine*).

⁵⁰ **The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2004.** Resolution #266, “Immigrants in the United States: Ministries of Hospitality, Advocacy, and Justice” (*Italics are mine*).

4. Restored discretion to immigration courts so that mandatory detention might be used only in cases when an immigrant presents a threat to national security or a danger to the immediate community.
5. Effective and humanitarian border protection.

In sum, many immigrants are an integral part of the fabric that makes America's life possible. They are an integral part of our society, its goals and its values. These immigrants could be our parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, doctors, policemen, grocers, waiters, cooks, babysitters, gardeners, lawyers, favorite actors, or sports heroes. As part of the backbone of our society, they have made this country strong and will continue to contribute to its future with God's help and with our help. Thus, let us remember the words of Cesareo Gabarain's Creed of the Immigrant People:

*We believe we should be faithful to God, the only One and Sovereign, who guides the lives of rich and poor, old and young, women and men of all races, languages, beliefs and conditions; and who invites us to build a new reality: God's Kingdom of love, solidarity and eternal life. This is our faith, and we proclaim it wherever we are, because "God goes with us." Always marching! Alleluia! Amen!*⁵¹

Sources for Immigration Information

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264. Assistance, Sanctuary, and Deportation Relief for Central American, Caribbean, Salvadoran, and Other Refugees
265. Immigrants and Refugees: To Love the Sojourner
266. Immigrants in the United States: Ministries of Hospitality, Advocacy, and Justice
267. Civil Rights of Undocumented Workers and Employee Benefits
365. Task Force to Study Immigration/ Naturalization Issues for Clergy

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⁵¹ Joel N. Martínez and Raquel M. Martínez' work ***Fiesta Cristiana: Recursos para la adoración (Resources for Worship).*** (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003.) p. 267.

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The Good Steward (Sermon 51)—Luke 21:2
In What Sense We Are to Leave the World (Sermon 81)—2 Corinthians 6:17–18
The Marks of the New Birth (Sermon 18)—John 3:8
National Sins and Miseries (Sermon 130)—2 Samuel 24:17
The New Birth (Sermon 45)—John 3:7
The New Creation (Sermon 64)—Revelations 21:5
On Charity (Sermon 91)—1 Corinthians 13:1–3
On God's Vineyard (Sermon 107)—Isaiah 5:4
On Love (Sermon 139)—1 Corinthians 13:3
On Perfection (Sermon 76)—Hebrews 6:1
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Grantmakers Concerned with Immigration and Refugees (www.gcir.org)

Informative site with statistics and references to articles on many subjects related to immigration.

Building Democracy Initiative: Defending Civil and Human Rights

(http://buildingdemocracy.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1).

An organization committed to providing up-to-date information on attacks against civil and human rights and exposing racist and nativist leaders and organizations.

Immigration Forum (www.immigrationforum.com)

Well-respected organization formed to embrace and uphold America's tradition as a nation of immigrants. The Forum advocates and builds public support for public policies that welcome immigrants and refugees and that are fair and supportive to newcomers in our country.

Sacks & Kolken, both immigration lawyers, have a good web site (www.sackskolken.com) that publishes AILA (American Immigration Lawyers Association) articles

American Immigration Lawyers Association (www.aila.org)

American Civil Liberties Union (www.aclu.org) publishes articles about immigrant rights

National Immigration Law Center (www.nilc.org)

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) is a national support center whose mission is to protect and promote the rights of low-income immigrants and their family members. NILC staff specialize in immigration law and the employment and public benefits rights of immigrants. The center conducts policy analysis and impact litigation and provides publications, technical advice, and trainings to a broad constituency of legal aid agencies, community groups, and pro bono attorneys.