

Resolution of Witness ON BECOMING AN IMMIGRANT-WELCOMING CONFERENCE

Submitted by the Justice and Witness Council of the MACUCC and adopted by the Conference

SUMMARY

This resolution calls on the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ and its congregations to become Immigrant Welcoming as it recognizes the ongoing struggles of refugees and migrants who come to the United States seeking safety, security, freedom and opportunity but instead experience suffering as they fear raids, deportation, and witness their families being torn apart. It further encourages the development of policies to facilitate this. The 2016 Annual Meeting of the MACUCC voted to sponsor a similar resolution to General Synod, but it explicitly did not vote to declare itself Immigrant Welcoming. Therefore, this resolution acts upon the resolution adopted by the Thirty-first General Synod.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONAL

Our Jewish and Christian traditions honor the text from Leviticus 19:33-34 (adapted from NRSV): "When an immigrant resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the immigrant. The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt." In Matthew 25 Jesus speaks of those who will receive the kingdom: "When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger you welcomed me..." Jesus also says (Mark 12:31, NRSV) "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

This resolution is in keeping with the commitment of the United Church of Christ to provide extravagant welcome to all God's children. As negative stereotyping of immigrants increases, becoming an "immigrant welcoming" church provides a critical alternative witness rooted in Biblical and theological principles the United Church of Christ deeply values.

TEXT OF THE MOTION

Whereas the International Association for Refugees has stated, "The world is in the midst of a long-term refugee crisis;" and

Whereas thousands of refugees and migrants come from throughout the world to the United States seeking safety, security, freedom, and opportunity; and

Whereas this influx of immigrants has enriched our spirits and strengthened our economy; and

Whereas our immigrant siblings continue to suffer as they fear raids, deportation, and seeing their families torn apart; and

Whereas migrants bring us as offerings their stories and experiences, dreams and hopes, energy and skills; and

Whereas our new neighbors experience difficulties adjusting to life in a new country; difficulties such as language barriers, culture shock, a sense of loss and isolation; and

Whereas the welcome and support immigrants receive helps in the building of safe communities and future prosperity; and

Whereas the United Church of Christ (UCC) declares “No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcomed here;” and

Whereas many historic UCC churches were founded by religious refugees; and

Whereas as Jesus Christ stood for the dignity of the human being regardless of national boundaries; and

Whereas as current treatment of immigrants constitutes a great moral evil; and

Whereas the twenty-ninth General Synod passed a compassionate immigration resolution that included encouraging “congregations to further engage in education work on immigration from a faith perspective, participating in border delegations and working toward making your congregation an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation;”

Whereas the thirty-first General Synod passed a resolution calling on “Conferences and Associations to call on their members to become active Immigrant Welcoming Congregations and proclaim themselves to be so;”

Whereas a number of Massachusetts Conference congregations have formally declared themselves Immigrant Welcoming Congregations and taken active steps to live this witness in their communities;

Therefore be it resolved, that the that the 219th Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 2018 declares itself an Immigrant Welcoming Conference;

Be it further resolved, that the 219th Annual Meeting of the MACUCC encourages the development of U.S. policy dedicated to facilitating the respectful welcome and inclusion of all immigrants, and calls on its members to engage with their lawmakers towards this end;

Be it further resolved, that the 219th Annual Meeting of the MACUCC encourages its Associations to proclaim themselves Immigrant Welcoming and to encourage their members to become active Immigrant Welcoming Congregations and proclaim themselves to be so;

Be it finally resolved the 219th Annual Meeting recognizes that addressing the concerns of immigrants and refugees is central to living the love and justice of Jesus, and asks that the Immigration and Refugee Task Team of the Conference continue to make resources available in support of immigrants and refugees.