

Immigration



What are the facts about immigration?

The U.S. has always been a land of immigrants — beginning with migrants from Southeast Asia, European immigrations from the 15th Century onward and, following the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, immigrants from all over the world enriching the diversity of our culture and national identity.

- Legal immigration increased from 9.6 million in 1970 to a high of 38 million in 2007, and significantly slowed with the recession. According to immigration statistics, two-thirds of this increase can be attributed to family reunification.
- The number of undocumented immigrants is now generally estimated to be 11 million. ‘Undocumented immigrants’ includes not only those who have crossed the border without legal documents but also those who have overstayed their visas or violated other terms of their visas.
- The biggest problem associated with undocumented immigrants is the creation of a ‘shadow economy.’ These immigrants are unable to legally obtain jobs. Unscrupulous employers and labor contractors exploit them for cheap labor, misclassify them to avoid paying payroll taxes, and thereby create an ‘uneven playing field’ that handicaps ethical employers.
- All immigrants – legal and undocumented – pay taxes. If their income is so low that they do not pay income tax, they still pay other taxes such as sale taxes, fuel taxes, and car taxes like everyone else and contribute to our economy.
- Recent studies indicate that a legalization program would be not only a humanitarian act but also a form of economic stimulus: Workers with legal status earn more than undocumented workers, pay more taxes, and spend more for consumer goods, thereby strengthening U.S. businesses. It has been estimated that in Virginia the wages of currently undocumented workers would increase by \$1.2 billion, generating an additional \$371 million in tax revenue and creating 27,000 new jobs.

What does the Bible say?

- Throughout the Bible the people of God are called to love sojourners among us as much as we love ourselves.
- “When an 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.” (Lev 19:34)
- “For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien . . . then I will dwell with you.” (Jer 7:5-7)
- In the parable of the Great Judgment Jesus taught that those who welcome the

stranger welcome Him and inherit the kingdom, while those who fail to welcome the stranger deny Him and do not inherit the kingdom (Mt 25: 31-46).

- “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb 13:1-2).

What does The United Methodist Church say?



- “We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God. We affirm the right of all persons to equal opportunities for employment, access to housing, health care, education, and freedom from social discrimination. We urge the Church and society to recognize the gifts, contributions and struggles of those who are immigrants and to advocate justice for all.”

The Social Principles of The UMC, ¶162/III/H.

- “The United Methodist Church affirms the worth, dignity, and inherent value and rights of all persons regardless of their nationality or legal status. United Methodist churches throughout the United States are urged to build bridges with migrants in their local communities, to learn from them, celebrate their presence in the United States and recognize and appreciate the contributions in all areas of life that migrants bring. We call upon United Methodist churches to . . . advocate for legislation that will uphold the civil and human rights of all migrants in the United States . . . denounce and oppose the rise of xenophobic, racist, and violent reactions against migrants . . . [and] advocate for the comprehensive reform of the US immigration system.”
The Book of Resolutions of The UMC 2008, 418-419.

What do You say?

- What you say depends on what you believe and know – keep growing in your faith and becoming more informed.
- Learn the language of immigrants in your locality. Welcome them as members of the family of God. Share meals, attend worship services and social events with them.
- Promote a Bible study about immigration in your church, using resources such as those listed below.
- Find ways to help immigrants get jobs, and obtain access to housing, education, health care, and sound legal advice.
- Urge your members of Congress to support comprehensive immigration reform, including a path to citizenship for all undocumented immigrants, the protection of rights of workers, and reunification of families.

For additional resources and information visit: “Biblical Musings on Immigration” <www.desertsouthwestconference.org/musings>; “Immigration Reform 101” <www.desertsouthwestconference.org/ir101>, and immigration materials at www.umc-gbcs.org/immigration, or contact either Glenn Rowley, Director of Justice and Missional Excellence, <GlennRowley@vaumc.org>; tel: 1.800.768.6040 / 804.521.1100, ext. 143 or John Copenhaver, Peace and Nonviolence Chair, Board of Church and Society <jcopenha@su.edu>.