

**NORTHAVEN UMC
CHURCH IN SOCIETY COMMISSION
POSITION STATEMENT ON IMMIGRATION**

Context of the recent trend of immigration to the United States

Too often the current national immigration debate ignores the economic and political conditions that force immigrants to leave as well as the role U.S. foreign policy has had in creating or perpetuating these conditions. Our present immigration dilemma may best be understood as a humanitarian crisis.

The social instability resulting from civil wars in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador in the 1980s and 1990s produced the first wave of recent Central American immigrants, most of whom were too poor to obtain entry visas into the U. S. The mere cessation of armed conflict in Central America in the 1990s did not resolve the underlying social inequities that produced the insurrections in the first place. The majority of people continue to experience the violence of a grinding poverty, which has only been exacerbated by the so-called “free” trade agreements such as NAFTA and CAFTA. As a result, during the decade of the 1990s, the U. S. experienced a rapid increase in the numbers of immigrants, both those with and without entry visas. Although the trend appears to be leveling off, a *New York Times* article of April 2, 2006, estimated that since the year 2000, approximately 850,000 immigrants have entered the U. S. each year without entry visas. Some 16 percent of those immigrants are children. Unlike the other great influx of mainly European immigrants, experienced by the U. S. in the early 1900s, in the recent trend the majority of immigrants without entry visas come from Mexico (56%) and other Latin American (22%) countries. Approximately two thirds of those immigrants obtain low paying jobs in farming, fishing, forestry (24%), cleaning (17%), and construction (14%). In 2005, the U. S. workforce totaled approximately 148 million workers, of whom about 4.9% were immigrants without legal entry visas or whose visas had expired.

These data reveal that the working poor of Latin America, along with U. S. workers, particularly our low skilled workers, are caught in an increasingly globalized economy in which U. S. corporations freely cross national borders seeking cheaper resources, including human labor, as well as higher profits. Both here and in the maquiladoras of Latin America, U. S. based transnational corporations have managed to depress wages for all workers by employing an apparently limitless pool of unskilled laborers. Thus, the poor of Latin America are pitted against those in the U. S., especially the African American and Latino working poor, in this economic “race to the bottom.”

Biblical Mandate

Our faith tradition, rooted in Scripture, teaches us to welcome our brothers and sisters with mercy and justice. From the Hebrew Bible: “The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:33-34). Isaiah insists that the fast (worship) Yahweh chooses is “to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house . . . then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily . . . then you shall be called the restorer of streets to dwell in.” (Is. 58).

In the New Testament Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger, for “what you do to the least of these who are my family, you do unto me.” (Matt. 25). In Luke 4 Jesus describes his ministry as preaching good news to the poor and setting at liberty those who are oppressed. The apostle Paul urges Christians to “love one another with mutual affection, practice hospitality, and live in harmony with one another.” (Romans 12)

A Christian Framework on Immigration

In public discourse the term “immigration reform” is usually focused on a negative framework of linguistic expressions: illegal immigrant, illegal alien, undocumented immigrant, temporary workers, amnesty, border security. We believe the conceptual framing of immigration is best served from a faith standpoint by a deeper and broader understanding based on compassion and a spirit of welcome. We do well to regard “the immigration problem” as a humanitarian crisis, a civil rights issue, and as a cheap labor issue.

A United Methodist Guideline

We endorse the following 2006 statement of the General Board of Church and Society, “Responding with Faith to Immigration.”

We pledge ourselves as followers of Christ to stand with our immigrant neighbors who have come to the United States from throughout the world. We recognize immigrants as human beings made in the image of God and we prayerfully commit ourselves to support laws that affirm their dignity, preserve their families, and acknowledge the value of their presence among us.

Northaven UMC Call to Action

We call on our elected officials to enact comprehensive immigration reform legislation that includes the following:

1. Establishes border management and immigration policies and procedures consistent with humanitarian values while protecting the safety of people and the environment on both sides of the border;
2. Establishes achievable, earned and verifiable legalization;
3. Preserves immigrant family unity;
4. Promotes workers’ rights and safeguards human rights.

Recognizing that the source of much immigration to the U. S. is global economic instability, we call on our legislators to create just legislation and policies that promote economic opportunities that truly benefit the poor.