

Oklahoma Conference of Churches Theological Statement on Immigration

Conversations on immigration involve deep, difficult and complex issues. The Oklahoma Conference of Churches (OCC) believes the way we treat immigrants is an issue of faith. In both the Old and New Testaments, the care of the stranger and the ministry of hospitality are a central part of the activity of the people of God.¹ Each day in our congregations and service ministries, we witness the consequences of the current system. We see and hear the suffering of immigrant families who have been separated by deportation, who have experienced exploitation in the workplace because they have been unable or fearful of seeking protection. Oklahoma has been shaped by a series of immigrant peoples. Apart from our state's indigenous tribes, other Native Americans were brought, forcibly, to the territory on the Trail of Tears. Euro and African American peoples entered the state through the land runs and later migrations. All of these immigrant people have helped build our state. In light of our history and our faith, we call for an immigration system and policies which uphold the dignity of all human beings.

We call upon our elected officials to enact legislation that includes the following:

- An opportunity for hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows, regularize their status upon satisfaction of reasonable criteria and, over time, pursue an option to become lawful permanent residents and, eventually, United States citizens;
- Reforms in our family-based immigration system to significantly reduce family separations and waiting times for separated families to be reunited;
- The creation of legal avenues for immigrant workers and their families to migrate here and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner, with rights fully protected;
- Border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and treat all individuals with respect, while allowing the authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing the entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing state and federal immigration policy; and
- Policies which do not penalize church and humanitarian organizations for extending a ministry of hospitality and advocacy to immigrants present in our community.

As faith-based leaders and organizations we seek policies that uphold the human dignity of each person, all of whom are formed in the image of God. For this reason we feel that legislation (like HB 1804) which both restricts access to basic services and penalizes church and humanitarian organizations which attempt to provide these services, violates our beliefs. We urge our elected officials to conduct the immigration debate in a civil and respectful manner, mindful not to blame the immigrant for our social or economic ills or stereotype an entire population based upon fear or prejudice. It is our collective prayer that Oklahoma's elected officials would work together to craft immigration legislation of which our state, which was largely formed by immigration, can be proud.

¹Examples of biblical texts dealing with immigrant/alien peoples include: Leviticus 19: 9-10; 33-34, Deuteronomy 24: 17-21, Isaiah 1: 17, Hebrews 13: 2. Matthew 25: 34-40, and Ephesians 2: 11-13. Many additional texts could be included.