

# Oklahoma Conference of Churches

## Theological Statement on Immigration

### What We Believe

We believe the way we treat immigrants is an issue of faith. We believe that immigration laws and policies must uphold the human dignity of every person, each of whom is formed in the image of God. Any legislation or policy which restricts access to basic services or penalizes church and humanitarian organizations which attempt to provide these services violates our beliefs.

### Why We Believe It

Care of the stranger and the ministry of hospitality are central to the activity of the people of God. In Leviticus, it is written: “The stranger who resides among you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the lord your God.”<sup>1</sup> 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 immigrant peoples. Apart from our state’s indigenous tribes, other Native Americans were forcibly brought 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.

### What We Advocate

Conversations on immigration involve deep, difficult, and complex issues. 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. We call upon our elected officials to enact legislation that includes the following:

- Respect for and recognition of the human dignity of every immigrant;
- 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 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 19: 33-34. Other biblical texts dealing with immigrant peoples include: 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.