

GA-1925

ADDRESSING THE STATE OF GLOBAL FORCED MIGRATION (Sense-of-the-Assembly)

WHEREAS, currently more than 68.5 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes globally for reasons of war, violence, persecution, climate change, economic injustice, impoverishment, colonialism and its legacy, and exploitation, among others, so that the global state of forced migration and displacement has reached a crisis, a trend that continues to increase with no sign of a reversal; and

WHEREAS, more than 85% of those who are displaced are currently in countries that have little economic or structural capacity to provide care or services for them, while those nations who are far better able to do so, including the United States, have oftentimes placed restrictions on refugee admissions, asylum applications and other forms of immigration, even while benefitting economically from the impoverished and unstable countries from which many of these displaced persons flee; and

WHEREAS, policy debates and general discourse on migration in the United States, Europe, and, to a lesser extent, in Canada, have centered on justifications of restrictions that are racist, xenophobic, bigoted, and slanderous, and have specifically named people who are brown and black, from specific countries, and of certain faiths, particularly Islam, as excluded; and

WHEREAS, those countries that do host refugees and migrants often receive compensation from the US and Europe to keep the migrants from attempting to enter the US or Europe; and

WHEREAS, thus far, the global community has failed to address comprehensively and collaboratively the massive movement of people, most often for reasons of fear, self-interest, preservation of privilege, power, and wealth, enabling wealthy economies to benefit from the labor of migrants with little acknowledgement of obligations for the security and welfare of the migrants themselves; and

WHEREAS, due to restrictions and strict regulations, people take tremendous risks to reach safety and a new home, crossing deserts, seas, and other difficult terrain, for days, weeks, and months, only to meet reinforced and militarized borders, detention, and incarceration, likely rejection and forced return; not to mention the thousands who do not survive the journey at all; and

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a long history of providing welcome and creating robust structures of welcome for the resettlement of refugees; and

WHEREAS, global partners of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are advocating for and responding to the needs of the displaced and refugees among them, often with

support through Global Ministries, Week of Compassion, and the United Church of Christ's One Great Hour of Sharing offering, including:

- People fleeing from high levels of structural, social and economic violence in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and seeking asylum elsewhere to escape horrific conditions;
- African migrants and refugees who have become bottle-necked in North Africa, including in Morocco, in their attempt to make their way to Europe;
- Refugees from conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, now living in camps in Tanzania;
- Syrian and Iraqi displaced persons and refugees who have escaped war and conflict, now located throughout the Middle East and in Europe;
- Generations of Palestinian refugees displaced and dispossessed of their homes and property following the wars of 1948 and 1967, in the Middle East and beyond;
- People from throughout Southern Asia where millions are forced to migrate, and are trafficked and pushed into various forms of slavery;
- People at risk from climate change in the Pacific Islands, including Tuvalu, where rising sea levels threaten to flood and eventually eliminate whole island countries;

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is called to become an immigrant welcoming church (GA 2017); and, with the guidance of our global partners through Global Ministries, advocates for the rights and dignity of displaced persons and migrants the world over;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the 2019 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, July 20-24, 2019, affirm a vision of God's family that is all-inclusive, accepting, and welcoming, recognizing the dignity of every human being; and rejects the divisive discourse of fear, xenophobia, bigotry, and racism that pervades the discourse on global forced migration, including as it relates to policy debates on immigration; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2019 General Assembly call upon the members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to engage the matter of global forced migration, to pray and learn about the current state of global forced migration using, among other resources, those made available through the church, specifically Global Ministries and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee and Immigration Ministries; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2019 General Assembly urge members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to participate in practicable ways to address the state of global forced migration through

- support of denominational partners around the world who are responding to the needs of displaced people, whether they are refugees, migrants, internally

displaced, asylum-seekers, or others, through Global Ministries and Week of Compassion;

- engagement in refugee resettlement programs in the US including the Disciples Home Missions' Refugee and Immigration Ministries;
- advocacy for the rights of refugees everywhere based on the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951); and for Palestinian refugees specifically as stipulated in UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948), and for continued US funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency;
- advocacy and action on issues of economic justice, climate justice, and immigration justice; and
- efforts to dismantle racism, to learn about different cultures and religions, including Islam, and to counter any form of discrimination, bigotry, and xenophobia when encountered; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the 2019 General Assembly call upon the governments of the United States and Canada to take the issue of global forced migration seriously, leaving behind partisan discourse and promoting actively the principles of the United Nations' Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, which seeks, among other things, to:

- address all aspects of international migration, including the humanitarian, developmental, human rights-related and other aspects;
- make an important contribution to global governance and enhance coordination on international migration;
- present a framework for comprehensive international cooperation on migrants and human mobility; and
- set out a range of actionable commitments, means of implementation and a framework for follow-up and review among Member States regarding international migration in all its dimensions,

and for Disciples members and settings to advocate for the US and Canada to work with the global community toward these goals.

Board of Directors of the Division of Overseas Ministries

BACKGROUND:

Migration, displacement, and exile have been present throughout human history, including in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Some biblical examples include God's call of Abram to leave Ur; Joseph's brothers' venture to Egypt to buy grain because of famine in Canaan; Exodus as a story of escape across borders; Noah and the threat of climate change; the Babylonian exile; and the Holy Family's escape to safety soon after the birth of Jesus because of King Herod's edict that all first-born male children under two born in the Bethlehem area be killed.

Jesus teaches us that the two greatest commandments are to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). When Jesus spoke

of the judgment, he taught the reality of the realm of God by saying, “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’... ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it unto me” (Matthew 25:35-36, 40). The author of the letter to the Hebrews goes on to remind the faithful, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2). James warns against the sin of partiality that gives preference to those with resources over those without access. (James 2:9).

In our day, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in a 2017 report, estimates that more than 68.5 million people are forcibly displaced from their homes, including more than 5 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). This massive displacement is the largest in recorded history, and there is no sign of a reversal of the trend. While almost two-thirds of those displaced remain within their own countries, most cannot return home. The UNHCR report cites war, violence, and persecution as significant causes. Additional factors for global forced migration include climate change, drought and famine, and impoverishment, among others.

The overwhelming majority of those who have been forcibly displaced outside their home countries currently reside in poorer, developing countries, barely able to provide services for their own populations, let alone influxes of new arrivals. Countries and systems increasingly restrict the movement of people, denying them respite and dignity. The global community needs to be engaged in creating and strengthening international systems to better accommodate this phenomenon so that the responsibilities, and the opportunities, of caring for humanity are shared.

Among economically developed countries, contemporary policy debates around immigration policies in the United States and Europe in particular, with few exceptions, have centered on stereotypes and fear, suggesting that newcomers would be “criminals and rapists,” violent terrorists, usurpers of public wealth and job opportunities. Efforts, including presidential executive orders, have been made to disallow people from coming to the US based on their countries of origin and their religion. Children have been separated from their families, with long-term impact on their mental health a result. This is a not-so-subtle message that brown and black people, and Muslims, in particular, are not welcome, and a clear effort to preserve the privilege of some at the expense of many.

With this resolution, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recognizes the global scale of the issue, the human impact, the variety of causes, the responses of many of our global partners, and the abhorrence of racism, xenophobia, and bigotry that underlie barriers to addressing the matter with a sense of justice.

References:

- * “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017,” published by UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017/>
- * Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>
- * UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948), <https://www.unrwa.org/content/resolution-194>
- * The UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>

**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly ADOPT GA-1925.
(Discussion Time: 24 minutes)**