

Civil ♦ Rights ♦ for ♦ All ♦ Immigrants

A Statement of the Gamaliel Foundation and Religious Leaders

“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the stranger. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” -- Leviticus 19:33-34

“And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? . . . ‘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 to me.’” --Matthew 25:38,40

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” --Hebrews 13:2

1. We remember

that the biblical tradition reveals God as present in the strangers welcomed by Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18), as the liberator of the Chosen People from their forced sojourn and enslavement in the land of Egypt, and as a God of mercy “who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing” (Deuteronomy 10:18) and who commands the people of God to do the same (Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19);

that Jesus was a refugee in Egypt (Matthew 2) and is encountered in the experience of strangers, refugees, and migrants throughout history (Matthew 25:38);

and that as people of God we are part of a world-wide community, which extends beyond exclusionary borders and which embraces refugees and immigrants.

2. We affirm

that all human beings are created in the image of God and therefore enjoy an innate human dignity with the right to food, shelter, freedom and the opportunity to provide for their own good and the good of society;

that, historically, the United States “has consistently received immigrants, refugees, exiles, and the persecuted from other lands. Fleeing injustice and oppression and seeking liberty and the opportunity to achieve a full life, many have found work, homes, security, liberty, and growth for themselves and their families”¹;

and that in a world “in which global poverty and persecution are rampant, the presumption is that persons must migrate in order to support and protect themselves and that nations who are able to receive them should do so whenever possible.”²

3. We condemn

all unjust laws and policies, which cause immigrant communities to live in a state of constant fear; the harshness and inflexibility of many federal immigration laws; the prospect of detention of immigrants without legal representation and supportive community; the threat of deportation for minor offenses; the exploitation and criminalization of undocumented immigrants, including their labor; the forced separation of immigrant families; and the punitive treatment, violence and death awaiting many immigrants who cross the borders of this nation
by land and sea.

4. We call for

public policy changes which secure civil rights for all immigrants, including:

family unity - a reform of U.S. family-based legalization categories to encourage family unity and family reunification in the immigration process and to end the forced separation of immigrant families

a pathway to legalization for undocumented workers - a broad legalization of undocumented immigrants who are contributing to the social and economic security of this nation

worker protection - full labor protection and labor rights for immigrants

humane border enforcement - while protecting the security of this nation, an emphasis on the safety and dignity of immigrants, offering a legal, safe, and orderly entry for those seeking to cross our borders in order to work

an end to inhumane detentions and deportations – no more warehousing of asylum seekers who have committed no crime and who have come to this country seeking freedom; an end to deportation for minor offenses; protection of civil liberties regardless of status of citizenship; an end to using local police to enforce immigration policies, which causes innocent people to live in fear

¹ “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope.” A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States, number 15. Issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, January 22, 2003.

² Ibid., number 39.



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