

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Understanding the changes needed in US immigration policy

*Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed
by the renewing of your minds, so that
you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. **Romans 12:2***

Information:

Current US immigration policy is complicated and governmental departments face a backlog of applications upwards of 5 to 7 years. If a foreign born person wishes to come to the US to work and live there are only a few ways he/she can obtain the necessary visa: obtain refugee/asylum status; win one of only 50,000 visas available each year in the US sponsored "lottery" (in 2009 9.1 million qualified applications were received for the lottery); or have a sponsor that is either employment or family based. While this sounds reasonable the parameters around these options are quite restricted. Since the visas for refugees and asylum seekers are specialized, the focus here will be on family and employment based sponsorships.

Coming to the US under a sponsorship program is lengthy and complex. A worker may be sponsored by an employer if he/she has a specialized field of expertise and a job offer. An immediate family member (such as spouse, adult child, or parent) who is a US citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident can act as a sponsor. Faced with these severe limitations and waiting periods of five years or more, many may see no other choice but to immigrate to the US without proper documentation.

It is estimated that approximately 12 million undocumented people reside in the US and another estimated 300,000 come each year. Billions of dollars have been poured into enforcement measures such as increasing border patrol presence, construction of border fences, and mass deportation of undocumented workers. However, statistics show that this is not stopping the migration of workers into the US. For the last three years

there have been efforts to overhaul immigration policy through enacting Comprehensive Immigration Reform yet congress has refused to act even though those on all sides of the immigration issue agree the current system is broken.

Insight:

The Presbyterian Church (USA) has called for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (visit www.pcusa.org to access information including a Bible study) through action of the 216th General Assembly and by signing on to faith initiatives which urge congress to act. These statements by the church support effective immigration reforms that will adhere to the following standards:

- Create a process for undocumented immigrants in the US to earn their legal status
- Reduce waiting periods and uphold family unity
- Protect workers from exploitation



Visas have remained static over the years even though demand has increased. The market for low-skill workers has increased yet the number of visas released each year is very low. Only 66,000 visas per year are available to low-skilled, nonagricultural workers and 30,000 for agricultural workers yet hundreds of thousands of these jobs are filled each year by immigrant labor, including undocumented immigrants.¹ These arbitrary caps on low-skilled workers help create an environment that fosters the undocumented migration of workers and fear of deportation among workers which results in silence on abuses and dangerous work environments.

For more detailed analysis of the current immigration policy and the need for reform visit:

www.interfaithimmigration.org or
www.faithandimmigration.org

Invitation to Act:

A large grassroots effort is needed to ensure congress acts this year on immigration. Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) must be consistent with the needs of the labor market, uphold basic human rights, and reflect American values such as family unification. Learn about CIR and educate faith-based and civic groups about this issue. Contact members of congress and request that they support CIR that embodies the values you hold.

Lead a Bible study using the study guide resource entitled, *Resolution Calling for a Comprehensive Legalization Program for Immigrants Living and Working in the United States* (PDS# 68-6000-05-001). The program consists of seven units and includes a leader's guide and may be downloaded at www.pcusa.org/oga/publications/immigrant-legal.pdf. Sojourners has created a study available for purchase at www.sojo.net, entitled "Strangers in the Land."

Inquire:

While working to overhaul the immigration policy of the US it is important to undergird these efforts with prayer and meditation. Many voices may be urging the US to be guarded in extending visas to workers but as Christians we are called to discern what is good and acceptable based on the commandment to love God and neighbor. Immigration policy may never be perfect but it can be improved to better meet the needs of the US and those seeking better life opportunities. Join in prayer for people crossing international borders, the church, and elected officials everywhere.

God, you give us life in abundance. This country has been greatly blessed by you with natural resources and by gifted and talented individuals who for generations have crossed oceans and lands to contribute to American society and gain livelihoods for their families. We are indeed a nation of nations, incorporating newcomers into the ever growing and diverse body we call the United States. The whole world belongs to you and all the people in it, help us and our elected officials act in responsible ways with all that you have entrusted to us. Protect those who journey with their own hopes and dreams for their families. In Christ, the head of the church and light to the world we pray. Amen.

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¹ Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform,
www.justiceforimmigrants.org.