

IMMIGRATION

I was a stranger and you welcomed me, (Matthew 25:35)

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God (Ephesians 2:17-19)

The Vermont Ecumenical Council and Bible Society unites in calling for just and fair national, state and local policies and action regarding immigrants, the strangers amongst us. We are called by our Christian faith to ensure that immigrants seeking relief from poverty, discrimination and/or persecution, or who simply wish to become members of our communities, who are contributing to the richness and welfare of our rural economy, find welcoming hands and hearts and a supporting social, legal and political environment.

“One of the most consistent truths taught in Sacred Scripture is that the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jesus is totally inclusive, no one individual, no group of people of whatever race or nation is excluded from God’s plan of salvation and his realm of love. When we say Our Father, we are acknowledging that there is but one God, the parental source of all human persons. We are all members of the family of God, and as such, we are all brothers and sisters.” Vermont Ecumenical Council, Statement on Racism: “Brothers and Sisters Together” 2008

There is great uniformity across denominations on this issue, as reflected in the following statement:

“Holy Scripture teaches us that all human beings are made in the image of God and that Jesus Christ gave his life for all people. Furthermore, both the Old and New Testaments declare the importance of hospitality to resident alien and strangers, a hospitality that rests on our common humanity. All human beings are therefore deserving of dignity and respect, as we affirm in our Baptismal Covenant. So our gracious welcome of immigrants, documented or undocumented, is a reflection of God’s grace poured out on us and on all.”

--The Episcopal Church, House of Bishops Pastoral Letter: “The Nation and the Common Good: Reflections on Immigration Reform,” September 21, 2010.

The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right.

There are approximately 1200-1500 immigrant workers* in Vermont who sustain our iconic dairy farms, our orchards and nurseries. These men and women play a key role in making those enterprises economically viable. Without their labor, according to a staff member of the Vermont Farm Bureau, we could “kiss Vermont’s landscape goodbye” as many farms would fail and be sold for development.

We are a diverse network of Christians in Vermont working together to serve the common good through public worship and prayer; acts of mercy and care; and loving prophetic witness for peace, justice and the integrity of creation.



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The majority of these immigrant workers come from Mexico and Guatemala. They seek work to earn money to send back to families and communities they leave behind. U.S. immigrant workers send more than 20 billion dollars annually back to Mexico, enabling families to feed themselves and perhaps educate their children.

Immigrant workers benefit Vermont farmers, the state's rural economy, and people living in poverty in their home country. How they are treated while in Vermont is not simply a legal issue, but also a moral question. What obligations do we have toward these men and women?

As Christian citizens of the U.S., we must confront attitudes of cultural superiority, indifference and racism, accepting immigrants as persons with dignity and rights, who reveal to us the presence of Christ.

We must recognize our complicity in creating and maintaining unjust economic rules and practices. In a democratic country, government acts in our name and with our tax dollars. Our concern as Christians for the dignity and rights of immigrants extends beyond public policy issues to see the face of Christ crucified and risen in the stranger.

*We use the term "immigrant worker" to emphasize that most of the people we are discussing come from other countries to work in Vermont. The term "migrant worker" can mean someone who moves from place to place within their native country, often performing seasonal work. Those immigrant workers employed on Vermont dairy farms may not have work visas as the U.S. Government only issues 10 month agricultural visas while dairy farms operate 365 days a year.

This statement was written by The Peace, Justice, and the Integrity of Creation Committee of the Vermont Ecumenical Council and Bible Society and approved by the Board of Trustees on September 27, 2012.

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