

## **IMMIGRATION: ECONOMIC JUSTICE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Resolution B006**

**Title: Immigration: Economic Justice Implications**

**Committee: Standing Commission on National Concerns**

**House of Initial Action: House of Bishops**

**Proposers: Rt. Rev. Sanford Hampton, Assisting in Diocese of Oregon**

**Rt. Rev. Gregory Rickle, Diocesan Bishop of Olympia**

**Rt. Rev. Bavi Rivera, Assisting Bishop of E. Oregon**

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, that the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention recognize that all people living in the United States are entitled to protection provided by due process of law and that all immigrants and their families are entitled to receive protection granted by our laws and Constitution.; and be it further

Resolved, that the General Convention call for a moratorium on raids carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at work sites, transportation systems, community gatherings, roadside check points and private residences leaving families torn apart and children parentless; and be it further

Resolved, that the General Convention advocate for a return of congressional consideration and implementation of comprehensive immigration reform which will allow millions of undocumented immigrants who have established roots in the United States and are often parents and spouses of U.S. Citizens to have a pathway to legalization; and be it further

Resolved, that the General Convention deplore conditions found in immigration detention centers and call for an accountability to ensure detainees are provided with humanitarian treatment, adequate food and medical care and sanitary conditions; and be it further

Resolved, that the General Convention (a) call for termination of the 287 G partners program which allows local police agencies to enforce immigration law, and (b) return that enforcement to Federal Immigration Agents, leaving local law enforcement agencies to the work of keeping communities safe, and (c) provide for a sense of safety for immigrant victims of crimes to come forward and report without fear of detention and deportation.

### **EXPLANATION**

Twenty years ago a general amnesty for immigrant workers was granted by the federal government. Immigrants who could demonstrate “good character” and financial stability and were able to pay a penalty could apply for legal permanent residency and eventual

citizenship.

For many years family members who were U.S. citizens or legal residents could petition for residency for certain immediate relatives. A fine could be paid and family members did not need to leave the United States to obtain a visa. That avenue is now closed. Undocumented family members need to leave the country to obtain a visa and then can face a ten year ban on re-entry – a waiver is not assured. Depending on the family category, petitions for visas can take up to 20 years to be granted. Even immediate visas for spouses and minor children are now backlogged.

Immigrants are filling the jobs that go unwanted and unfilled by U.S. citizens. Employers report that they advertise for weeks and offer jobs to U.S. citizens prior to turning to undocumented workers. Workers who are U.S. citizens often quit after only a few days of work. However, employers who are trying to “do it the right way” are not able to bring people into the country on employment visas because the system is so backlogged. Meanwhile, crops are not being planted or harvested. Tourist and recreational attractions have had to close down due to the labor shortage.

Immigration enforcement is creating havoc with families who are otherwise stable members of our communities. Parents are afraid to send children to school; children are afraid of going home and finding their parents gone. Victims of crime are hesitant to report crimes for fear of revealing their undocumented status.

Crossing the border without documents is a civil offense, a misdemeanor. It is not a crime of any type to be simply living in the U. S. undocumented (it only becomes a felony if someone comes back after having been deported). Nevertheless, immigrants who are caught in raids often spend months and even years in jail-like settings while their cases are being appealed. As a result of the raids, detentions and deportations, a large number of families will live their lives not knowing what happened to their loved ones – this is happening to many, many families. It is time to address this problem directly.

Treaties like NAFTA (The North American Free Trade Act) harm foreign workers by allowing the import and sale of cheap basic goods in their countries. U.S. agriculture, particularly large agribusiness corporations subsidized by our government, can sell basic foods like rice and beans in countries like Mexico more cheaply than the native industry. When small farmers cannot sell their products, they leave their farms for their cities where jobs are not available. In order to provide for their families, workers are obliged to seek employment as a last resort in other countries like the United States. Most people, given a choice, would prefer to remain in their own countries.

Scripture is full of immigrant stories – in the Book of Genesis Abraham and Sarah make their journey to the land that God promised to them and their descendants. Leviticus reminds us that we are to welcome strangers as citizens in our lands. There are two major stories concerning immigration into Egypt: in the first Jacob’s family were economic refugees due to a famine in the land; In the second Mary and Joseph as political refugees sought sanctuary with the child in Egypt.

