

## **The Alien Among You Passed at General Convention, 2006**

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

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone. Ephesians 2: 19*

Along with every other country in the world, the United States has a vision of what it means to be a citizen, and how “aliens” may become citizens and enjoy the fullness of our national life. Ironically, given the current debate over immigration policies and the added restrictive context after September 11, 2001, the United States has been, from the beginning, a country of immigrants.

Most Americans, or our ancestors, were once aliens. For generations people have come to the United States seeking refuge from oppression, economic opportunity, religious freedom, family reunion, and hope. Gradually we have developed immigration and refugee policies that have become more deliberate over the generations, at times glaringly racist and exclusionary, at other times more inclusive and hospitable.

### **Hospitality to the stranger**

For Christian people, welcoming the stranger is not merely a policy, it is our vocation. We are called to offer hospitality to those who come to us and to make room for them at the table. An integral part of the work of the Episcopal Church has been its 60-year history of serving refugees from all parts of the world, inviting parishes to partner with Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), the refugee assistance arm of the Church, in a ministry of resettlement. Consistent with this history, the Church has adopted resolutions supporting a generous policy of admitting refugees to the United States.

The Episcopal Church joined other faith-based and refugee-rights communities pressing for the reinvigoration of the U.S. resettlement program when security concerns following the tragedy of September 11 reduced the number of refugees being admitted to the United States by half. Those who arrive as refugees are generally victims rather than perpetrators of terror, and the lack of evidence associating refugees with terrorism supports maintaining an admissions policy of open and responsible resettlement.

### **Comprehensive immigration reform**

The overall U.S. immigration system is not working well, and there is a growing consensus about the need for change. Immigration law that was intended to reunite families has resulted in the delay of several years before some spouses and other relatives can receive visas to immigrate to the United States. The presence of millions of undocumented aliens—especially agricultural workers and others who perform unskilled or low skilled jobs that are critical to the American economy—encourages an “underground” world, creates an environment of constant anxiety for the aliens and the communities in which they work, engenders inhospitable and cruel separation of families, and makes it nearly impossible for the undocumented workers to achieve regular and permanent status in the United States.

The political climate after September 11 and the security challenges faced by all countries have contributed to worrisome reductions in some protections of civil liberties. For immigrants, especially for those who violate immigration law, due process is often more rhetoric than reality.

While there is widespread frustration with current immigration law and policy, various proposed changes represent radically different views of immigrants and their place in the U.S. community. Some proposed changes would increase the restrictions on immigrants and those seeking refuge here, returning undocumented workers to their countries of origin, reducing civil liberties for the most vulnerable and shrinking economic immigration even further.

## Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns

The Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with with Justice Concerns recommends that the Episcopal Church continue to support immigration reform that is rooted in the Biblical vision of “hospitality to the stranger,” recognizing a nation’s right to protect itself and the deeper human right to migrate to places of safety and wellbeing. The Commission commends Executive Council’s adoption of Council Resolution NAC 032 at its June 2005 meeting that urges the Episcopal Church to support comprehensive immigration reform that will balance the legitimate need to “patrol our borders” with a responsible and humane process for inclusion of people who come to the United States seeking economic opportunity, refuge from persecution and family reunification. It is for us who no longer are strangers and aliens, but citizens of the household of God and beneficiaries of the kindness of strangers, to advocate for fair and hospitable immigration policies. We have more to fear from restrictive and punitive policies than from those who seek hope and opportunity in the United States. Let us not fear being agents of generosity and abundance. Let us not oppress the aliens among us. And let us advocate for immigration policies that offer fair and just access to American life and the reasonable possibility of entrance into the community of citizenship.

### **The Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns supports the following principles of just and fair immigration policies:**

1. Undocumented aliens should have reasonable opportunity to pursue permanent residency.
2. Legal workers should be allowed to enter the United States to respond to recognized labor force needs.
3. Close family members should be allowed to reunite without undue delay with individuals lawfully present in the United States.
4. Fundamental U.S. principles of legal due process should be granted all persons.
5. Enforcement of national borders and immigration policies should be proportional and humane.

### **Resolution A017 Fundamental Immigration Principles – FINAL VERSION**

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church receive “The Alien Among You” in the Blue Book Report of the Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns; and, while recognizing the duty and right of a sovereign nation to protect and defend its borders, adopt the following fundamental principles included in “The Alien Among You” as the policy of the Episcopal Church.

1. Undocumented aliens should have reasonable opportunity to pursue permanent residency.
2. Legal workers should be allowed to enter the United States to respond to recognized labor force needs.
3. Close family members should be allowed to reunite without undue delay with individuals lawfully present in the United States.
4. Fundamental U.S. principles of legal due process should be granted all persons.
5. Enforcement of national borders and immigration policies should be proportional and humane.

And be it further

Resolved, that the 75<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church deplores any action by the Government of the United States which unduly emphasizes enforcement, including militarization of the border between the United States and Mexico, as the primary response to immigrants entering the United States to work, and be it further

Resolved, that the Episcopal Church undertake a campaign to educate Episcopalians as to the plight of refugees, immigrants, and migrants, which will include information about the root causes of migration, and be it further

Resolved, that this campaign calls the church to commit to welcoming strangers as a matter of Christian responsibility, to advocate for their wellbeing and protection and to urge its members to resist legislation and actions which violate our fundamental beliefs as Christians, including the criminalization of persons providing humanitarian assistance to migrants.