

UCC IL Conference Taskforce on Immigration Minute for Mission

"When a migrant resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the migrant. The migrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the migrant as yourself, for you were migrants in the land of Egypt." God's word in Leviticus is echoed in Jesus' call for compassion in the Gospel of Matthew, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me. . ."

Again and again, the Bible expresses our obligation to immigrants in our land, the stranger in our lives. We in the U.S. have received many groups which seemed alien to us at the time: Africans, Germans, Irish, Polish, Chinese and Japanese; many initially struggled with our language and culture and were isolated and discriminated against before being accepted as Americans, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Perhaps some of these people we know as our own ancestors, whose stories of struggle and resilience are too easily forgotten.

Once again we are being challenged, this time by immigration primarily from the South, and by those from other parts of the world who may not share our Christian faith. We are challenged to learn from our past mistakes, to think and act with our spiritual mind, and to embrace Christ's vision for one humanity, where all of God's children are treated with the inherent dignity and worth they deserve. Our current immigration laws do not reflect the world we are called by God to create and as a result, thousands of our immigrant neighbors suffer unnecessary pain and injustice. The U.S. is on course to deport a record 400,000 undocumented immigrants, devastating families, and breaking apart communities. There are over 30,000 immigrants held in deplorable conditions at over 300 detention centers across the United States on any given day awaiting deportation. Meanwhile, millions of immigrants live in the shadows, afraid to openly contribute to the country they love because of discriminatory laws and hate crimes.

Regardless of where we might stand on this issue politically, our Christian voice recognizes that we need change. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently wrote from a jail cell in Birmingham, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." The diverse churches and members of the United Church of Christ have always understood the moral imperative to challenge injustice and create new communities of mutuality and love across race, culture, religion, and nationality, based on the teachings of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In this spirit, the Illinois Conference of the UCC Immigration Task Force invites each of us to become an immigrant welcoming church. Becoming a welcoming congregation means befriending our immigrant neighbors, taking steps to educate ourselves on the myths and facts around our current immigration system, and holding sacred conversations on race and diversity. It means taking public action when our immigrant brother's or sister's dignity or safety is threatened. Becoming a welcoming congregation means holding our immigrant brothers and sisters who are caught up in unjust laws in prayer, and bringing comfort to affected families and communities in need. In the coming months we will have the opportunity to join other UCC churches in the education and advocacy efforts of the Illinois Conference Immigration Task Force. We have provided a brochure in your bulletin for upcoming opportunities within our church, and in the greater Chicago area. Thank you very much for your time, and please prayerfully consider joining us in becoming a church that welcomes and cares for all of God's people.