

1 The Board of Directors recommends this resolution be sent directly to a previously established
2 implementing body.

3
4 **CALLING THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO ADVOCATE FOR THE ETHICAL**
5 **AND COMPASSIONATE TREATMENT OF UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT**
6 **CHILDREN SEEKING REFUGE IN THE UNITED STATES**
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8 **Submitted by the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ**
9 **A Resolution of Witness**

10
11 **SUMMARY**
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13 According to the United States Department of Homeland Security, between the months of
14 October 2013 and July of this year, more than 52,000 unaccompanied minor-aged children have
15 been apprehended by United States border patrols when crossing the Mexico-United States
16 border illegally. Many of these children entering the United States come from Mexico, but the
17 vast majority are coming from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Many are assisted in
18 crossing the border through human smuggling networks, with many reported to have become
19 victims of violent crime and sexual abuse along the way. While immigration from these
20 countries has gone on for decades and has been largely driven by the desire to escape economic
21 struggles and violence in their home countries, the recent surge of immigrants seeking refuge in
22 the United States is largely the result of increased gang and drug-related violence in their home
23 countries.

24
25 Under current law, the Border Patrol is required to take child migrants who are not from Mexico
26 into custody, screen them, and transfer them to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, a part of the
27 Department of Health and Human Services (immigrants from Mexico are sent back
28 immediately). Since apprehension in the United States, these 52,000 children - those from
29 Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras - are being held in the custody of the United States
30 Customs Border Protection, crowded into detention centers, including makeshift warehouses,
31 while United States officials struggle to hold deportation hearings fast enough - at the same time
32 as it is challenged to meet the children's need for protective and supportive care as well as
33 medical, hygiene, and nutritional attention.

34
35 The Office of Refugee Resettlement will hold these children until they can be released to the
36 Department of Health and Human Services that is charged with finding a parent or relative who
37 can care for the child while their immigration case is processed, or putting the child in long-term
38 foster care.

39
40 These 52,000 children – and the number is estimated to swell to between 60,000 and 90,000 by
41 year's end – have come into the United States at a time when immigration reform is being hotly
42 debated in the halls of state and national government.

43 The purpose of this resolution is to provide the churches of the United Church of Christ with the
44 opportunity to raise a voice of faith in the midst of the political debate – a voice that calls for a
45 compassionate and ethical response to those coming into this country and our state – documented
46 or undocumented – seeking refuge from the daily struggle with poverty and violence. This
47 resolution calls on people of faith to consider ways we as individuals, churches, and/or
48 associations might engage in the care and support of the undocumented immigrant children in
49 our state and our nation.
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BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

The God of our faith is a God of love and mercy, peace and justice. God's vision of peace – *shalom* – is meant to be a way of life that incorporates each of these values so that all creation experiences wholeness and well-being.

As people of faith we are called by God to love our neighbors. Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (John 13:34 – NRSV). We also recall the biblical story where a scribe asks Jesus, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31 – NRSV)

As people of faith, we are called by God to treat those in need with compassion: "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience (Colossians 3:12 – NRSV).

As people of faith, we are called by God to work for peace and justice: "[God] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8 - NRSV). And Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9 – NRSV).

As people of faith we are called by God to be in solidarity with "the least of these" - to treat others as we would treat Christ. "... Then the righteous will answer ..., 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the ruler will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'" (full passage: Matthew 25:31-40 – NRSV *adapted*).

At the very heart of the Good News of Jesus Christ was his extravagant welcome, especially to those considered outside society's circle of belonging – even those considered outside the circle of God's grace. As people of faith, we are called by God to offer hospitality to the stranger among us. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord's followers should. Be sure to welcome strangers into your home. By doing this, some people have welcomed angels as guests, without even knowing it. Remember the Lord's people who are in jail and be concerned for them. Don't forget those who are suffering, but imagine that you are there with them" (Hebrews 13:1-3 – Contemporary English Version).

In the United Church of Christ we seek to offer the extravagant welcome of Christ summed up in a saying – one that is declared in churches across the nation on any given Sunday morning – one that is written on bulletins and banners visible to the public – "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here."

Our nation was built by immigrants from around the world. The U.S. has – until more recent times – prided itself on being today's Promise Land. The Statue of Liberty in the New York Harbor has welcomed immigrants since 1886 – those seeking a new and better life for themselves and their families. A poem, "New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus appears on a plaque mounted inside the pedestal of the statue that reads the famous words our nation's heritage has been built on: "Give me your tired, your poor/ Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free/The

102 wretched refuse of your teeming shore./ Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me/I lift my
103 lamp beside the golden door!"

104

105 As people of faith, it is not enough to worship God on Sunday mornings and be “hearers of the
106 word;” God calls us to be “doers of the word” (James 1:22). The prophet Amos wrote: “Take
107 away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let
108 justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:23-24)

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110 **MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

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112 Justice and Witness Ministries will continue to provide ways by which local churches,
113 Associations and Conferences can engage as allies, caregivers, and financial supporters in
114 meeting the needs of undocumented workers, especially women and children that have come to
115 the United States.

116

117 Working with ecumenical partners – particularly Church World Service and the United
118 Methodist Church – JWM will promote service opportunities through various available media to
119 the various ministry settings across the United Church of Christ.

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121 JWM will report our collective response to the Thirty-first General Synod.

122

123 **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY**

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125 The Thirtieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ will request that Justice and Witness
126 Ministries make available, upon request, educational resources and information regarding
127 opportunities for individual and church engagement and/or involvement – both at the state and
128 national level.

129

130 The Collegium of Officers will write letters to President Obama, Secretaries John Kerry and Jeh
131 Johnson, the Attorney General, members of Congress and State Governors to advocate for
132 compassionate and just treatment of undocumented children and youth.

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134 **PROBABILITY OF INSTITUTING SOCIAL CHANGE**

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136 By adopting this resolution and following through on its provisions the United Church of Christ
137 across all of its settings will offer an example of compassion and hope and will recall us to the
138 command of God to welcome the stranger and care for women and children and remind our
139 nation of our core identity as a commonwealth of strangers and fellow travelers.

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141 **TEXT OF MOTION**

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143 WHEREAS, tens of thousands of minor-aged children from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras
144 and Mexico have crossed into the United States seeking a refuge from poverty and violence,
145 creating a humanitarian crisis as the United States struggles to accommodate this huge influx of
146 immigrants both in terms of housing as well as processing them through the immigration system;
147 WHEREAS the United States is in the midst of debating immigration reform;

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149 WHEREAS our nation has been built by immigrants from around the world;

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151 WHEREAS our nation’s heritage as a “Promise Land” has, for centuries, welcomed those
152 seeking to make a better life for themselves and their families;

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154 WHEREAS Christ extended an extravagant welcome to all, and the churches of the United
155 Church of Christ seek to do likewise;
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157 WHEREAS people of faith are called to be a force for love, compassion, peace and justice; to
158 stand in solidarity with the marginalized and the disenfranchised; to raise a voice that calls for
159 the ethical treatment of all people, regardless of the circumstances;
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161 WHEREAS congregations across the United States (especially through the United Methodist and
162 United Church of Christ working in cooperation with Church World Service) are embarking on
163 the journey of becoming “Immigrant Welcoming Congregations” (IWC).
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165 WHEREAS participation in the Immigrant Welcoming Congregations initiative equips churches
166 to travel from mercy to justice, from service to incarnational friendship, from activism to
167 organizing, from “ministering to” immigrants to being transformed alongside of immigrant
168 communities.
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170 AND WHEREAS the Twenty Ninth General Synod (2013) also voted to support a resolution
171 calling for the United Church of Christ in its various settings to be actively involved in the
172 struggle for peace and justice and human rights for our Honduran brothers and sisters;
173
174 THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Thirtieth General Synod in 2015 raise a voice to
175 those in decision-making positions in our state and national settings of government calling for
176 the compassionate and ethical treatment of all immigrants, especially the most vulnerable of this
177 population, that treatment should include welcoming them into homes rather than detention
178 centers and, as their status is being determined, being generous with resources of education and
179 health care;
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181 LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Thirtieth General Synod invites Conferences of the United
182 Church of Christ to consider speaking truth to power by sending this resolution to President
183 Obama, to Secretary of State John Kerry, to the Attorney General of the United States Justice
184 Department, to Secretary Jeh Johnson, Head of Homeland Security, to each of our state
185 representatives in Washington, D.C., and to the office of the Governor in each state in which the
186 Conference is located;
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188 LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Thirtieth General Synod invites churches of the United Church
189 of Christ to seek to become informed of this humanitarian crisis as well as the resources for
190 becoming involved.
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192 LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Thirtieth General Synod invites churches and/or Associations
193 of the United Church of Christ to seek to work with our ecumenical partners in our states as well
194 as with other Conferences in the United Church of Christ that also seek to be part of the solution
195 to this national humanitarian crisis.
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197 LET IT BE RESOLVED Thirtieth General Synod invites local churches of the United Church of
198 Christ to study and consider joining congregations across the United States that are embarking on
199 the journey of becoming “Immigrant Welcoming Congregations” (IWC).
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201 LET IT BE RESOLVED that Thirtieth General Synod invites individuals, churches and
202 associations to prayerfully consider ways to provide support to the children coming into our state
203 and our nation and the agencies that are managing their care.

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205 LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that, Thirtieth General Synod invites our local churches to
206 hold in prayer the tens of thousands of child immigrants seeking refuge in our beloved country.

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208 **FUNDING**

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210 The funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the
211 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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213 **IMPLEMENTATION**

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215 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities the
216 United Church of Christ will determine the implementing body.