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United Church of Christ applauds president's executive immigration order as starting point

UCC leaders are heartened by President Obama's executive order, but look to Congress to do better for immigrants in United States

CLEVELAND (Nov. 21, 2014) – Leaders of the United Church of Christ are deeply heartened after President Barack Obama announced an executive action to shield up to 5 million immigrants living in the United States from deportation.

The Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo, executive minister of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, says the president's actions late Thursday evening, Nov. 20, reflect "a call to hospitality and welcome that is at the heart of our faith traditions, and is a core American value."

"Leaders from throughout the United Church of Christ have been working hard to change our broken immigration policies for years," said Jaramillo. "We have advocated, held vigils, marched, fasted and joined in civil disobedience to stop the deportations and stop family separations. We applaud the president for this historic move to do the morally right thing and provide relief from deportation for 5 million people."

The president's plan would allow parents of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents to apply for temporary relief from deportation with the ability to lawfully work and travel. In addition, undocumented spouses or other eligible family members of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents will be able to apply for a waiver to remain in the United States while awaiting a family reunification visa. The Deferred Action for Children Arrivals program (DREAM Act) also would be expanded to give some 270,000 people brought to the United States as children before Jan. 1, 2010, an opportunity for temporary protection from deportation.

Sandy Sorensen, director of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries office in Washington, D.C., noted that it has been 511 days since the Senate passed comprehensive immigration reform, while the House has failed to act. She said that the government needs to do better.

"The majority of Americans see we have a broken immigration system," Sorensen said. "There are signs of that all around us. We waited for Congress to act and they failed. The president's executive order is a good first step, but it leaves a lot of pieces still to be fixed."

The White House estimates that the plan would shield as many as 5 million people from deportation, giving 4 million people an opportunity to apply for work permits and temporary relief. Immigrants who have been in the United States for five years and are parents of citizens or legal permanent residents will be eligible. A million more people could be included through other new or expanded programs.

However, President Obama's program would still leave 6 million undocumented immigrants without relief.

"Congress still has the opportunity to face and respond to that, and act on the list left undone," Sorensen said. "We hope and pray they move past divisive rhetoric and seek the highest level of cooperation, not the lowest common denominator in this and many other issues. There are significant challenges that face our country and our world that require collaboration across party lines."

Said Jaramillo, "As the United Church of Christ, we must always remember those placed on the margins, those often unaccepted, so we will continue to outreach to those in need through our local ministries. We will continue to pray and walk alongside our immigrant brothers and sisters who are not eligible and commit to advocating for an inclusive implementation process."

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About the United Church of Christ:

The United Church of Christ is a mainline Protestant denomination with nearly 1 million members and more than 5,100 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly-gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

The UCC's motto ("That they may all be one") and tagline (God is still speaking,) supports the Church's long-standing commitment to social justice issues and its extravagant welcome to all, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.