

## “unWelcome to America”

by **John C. Dorhauer**  
**General Minister and President**

On Saturday, October 9, I gathered with a number of UCC members and clergy, including Southwest Conference Minister the Rev. Dr. Bill Lyons – to demonstrate for immigrant justice.

Every time I see the wall on our southern border, it shames me.

I have said before it stands as America’s greatest monument to white privilege. At almost 2,000 miles long, with a cost to build and maintain it at almost \$1million a mile – it is our largest and most expensive such monument.

Largely white immigrants who entered the U.S. at our east coast from Europe saw the Statue of Liberty – a universally recognized symbol of welcoming the stranger in our midst. Bearing the words of Emma Lazarus at its base, it asks the world to send us their poor, huddled masses, the tempest-tossed yearning to breathe free. The nobility and grand scope of that sentiment has always made me feel proud to be an American.

And then I show up in El Paso, or Nogales, or Tijuana and see the wall. It shames me.

White immigrants have a statue and a poem welcoming them.

The first nation tribes who lived here have either disappeared or were forced onto reservations.

Many African Americans are descendants of slaves imprisoned by the conquering white immigrants to these shores.

Many Asian peoples were brought here to lay the lines for the early railways, or mine for our gold, silver, and copper – only to be hauled into internment camps during the Second World War.

And for the brown people to our south we have erected not a statue with a poem that inspires and invites, but a wall, an armed militia, and angry citizens posing as vigilantes.

As a white male for whom America has laid out a welcoming mat, silence in the face of this oppressive power is not an option. Nor is an unchallenged acceptance of all this privilege affords me.

My voice stands in solidarity with those crying for justice.

My feet walk in accompaniment with those agitating for justice.

My ears hear the cries of those who can no longer live under these conditions.

My eyes serve to witness both to the trauma inflicted on people and land because of this wall and all it represents, and to the machinations that must be orchestrated in order for whites to maintain and distribute their unearned privilege.

My heart aches, and in the aching compels my feet, my hands, and my body to act.

In this election cycle, pay close attention to how the immigrant is portrayed. Don't accept the rhetoric of politicians who conjure and broker fear for political gain. Come to the wall; see with your own eyes what America has become. Meet those whom our government is teaching us to fear.

Then ask yourself what your privilege costs.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*John C. Dorhauer is General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.*

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