



## “Why don’t they go back?”

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In July, the U.S. President reacted to four U.S. Congresswomen’s critiques of certain administration policies, tweeting, “Why don’t they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came”—a statement conveying a racist worldview and xenophobic attitude.

The phrase “go back” is often used to make a claim about who belongs and who doesn’t, with little to no interest in the histories and realities of forced migration. Today, according to the United Nations, more than 70 million people have been forcibly displaced, the largest number in recorded history. Causes include war, violence, persecution, climate change, drought and famine, impoverishment, exploitation, and the legacies of colonialism. All people share a preference to remain safe and secure in their homes and communities, if that were an option. For victims of these circumstances, it most often is not.

Every region of the world—and many of our UCC and Disciples’ global partners—faces the impact of global forced migration daily, whether by experiencing the influx of people who have been forced from their homes, responding to their needs, or advocating for policies to improve the ways that nations address the issues of migration. We must ask why people are fleeing home; how temporary is their condition as they wonder what their future will hold; and what are their real options?

Migration, displacement, and exile are permanent realities in human history. Biblical texts are replete with stories of people, families, and communities that have been forced from their place of residence, including Jesus and the Holy Family. The theologian and scholar of world Christianity, Jehu Hanciles, has said that if you remove migration stories from the Bible, there wouldn’t be much left.

Walls, exclusion, and paying off other countries to contain forcibly displaced people are not viable solutions. As the Church, we have a different understanding of how we ought to care for each other as human beings, and we must make our

voice heard to hold countries—including our own—accountable to higher standards of policy and practice.

This summer, the UCC General Synod and Disciples General Assembly addressed the issue of global forced migration by affirming a vision of God’s family that is inclusive, accepting and welcoming; by committing to support global partners’ responses to the needs of displaced people and advocating for the rights of refugees; by agreeing to counter all forms of racism, discrimination, bigotry, and xenophobia and to work on issues of economic, climate, and immigration justice; and affirming the call upon our government to implement international agreements on migration.

Responsible, comprehensive, and collective responses to global forced migration are urgent, and available. Rather than blaming and vilifying with the question, “Why don’t they go back?” we are called to ask and answer, “How can we work together to welcome our neighbor?”

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