

Page

Resolution Number: New

Financial Implications: None

General Board of Global Ministries

1 Add new resolution to the Book of Resolutions as follows:

2

3 Global Migration and the Quest for Justice

4

5 “Ways must be found to share more equitably the resources of the world.”

6 Social Principles, The United Methodist Church

7

8 The United Methodist Church has frequently addressed general and specific topics

9 related to migration. The Social Principles affirm:

10 1). “We commit ourselves as a Church to the achievement of a world community that is a

11 fellowship of persons who honestly love one another. We pledge ourselves to seek the

12 meaning of the gospel in all issues that divide people and threaten the growth of world

13 community.” (64)

14 2). “In order to provide basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, education, health care

15 and other necessities, ways must be found to share more equitably the resources of the

16 world.” (58).

17 3). “We advocate for the rights of all migrants and applaud their efforts toward

18 responsibility self-organization and self-determination.”(163F)

19

20 Human migration is as old as human history. Individuals, families, tribes, and nations

21 have been on move since the days of Abraham and Sarah and before. Throughout the

22 centuries, political and economic factors, including wars; health and environmental

23 challenges; and racism, xenophobia, and religious discrimination have at times uprooted
24 people and at others lured them to new venues across continents and oceans as well as
25 national and ethnic boundaries.

26

27 Today, migration is at once a critical international issue and a necessary option for
28 millions of human beings. Some people seek to move; others have no alternatives.
29 Contemporary migration involves the linked realities of abundance and poverty and
30 racial/ethnic/religious identities and exclusion. The current global economic system
31 reflects an expectation many people will live in poverty, or have their nations torn by
32 conflict, so that others may live in abundance. That many people will resist poverty and
33 war through migration is an ancient and modern fact of human existence. As a
34 consequence, elaborate national and international systems of containment and
35 classification based on national origin have been developed over the past quarter-century
36 with regard to migrants.

37

38 Global migration as a factor in the quest for justice is of major concern to The United
39 Methodist Church as a denomination that is global in its vision, mission, and ministries.

40

41 I. Contemporary Migrants

42 Four categories of contemporary migrants can be delineated:

43 Refugees—persons outside of their country of origin who are unable or unwilling to
44 return for fear of persecution based on race, religion, ethnicity, political affiliation or

45 opinion; official “refugees” are so recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner
46 for Refugees, which is charged by the international community to oversee service to, and
47 protection of, refugees.

48 Asylum seekers—a type of refugee, persons who have left their homeland to petition for
49 refuge in the country to which they have fled; asylum seekers must be so recognized by
50 the countries whose protection they seek.

51 In 2007, recognized refugees and asylum seekers totaled 13.9 million.

52 Internally displaced persons—those who are displaced within their own country because
53 of military, economic, and social upheaval, and natural disasters such as famine,
54 earthquake and flood; they are generally not protected by the international community,
55 but must depend primarily for protection and assistance primarily on their country of
56 residence, which may be implicit in the cause of displacement. In 2007, such persons
57 numbered 24.5 million.

58 Economic migrants—are people who move from one country to another to find work.

59 Most frequently they seek to flee from poverty to economic opportunity, and often
60 permanently relocated so they may feed their families. Some are allowed into more
61 affluent nations as immigrants; some enter without documentation and may be welcomed
62 in times of labor shortages and deported in times of economic downturn or public
63 disapproval. Such migrants are among the most vulnerable in any society; many are
64 women and children who become the objects of abuse and brutality. One subcategory in
65 this classification consists of migrant workers, people who move from place to place,
66 often with the agricultural cycle, to find employment. Some return on periodic or

67 eventual permanent basis to their homelands; others make domestic and other ties in
68 places of employment and wish to remain. The number of current economic migrants is
69 difficult to calculate. Some estimates run as high as 100 million globally, with large
70 numbers in the affluent regions of North America and Europe.

71

72 II. A Context of Migration

73 Virtually all groups of today's migrants and refugees are battered by the divide between
74 the rich and the poor, a divide rooted in nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism and
75 directly caused by rapid corporate globalization in agriculture, industry, and commerce.
76 Currently, slightly more than 10% of the world's population consumes 85% of the
77 world's wealth while the rest make do with just 15% of that wealth. For example,
78 agricultural subsidization in Europe and the United States results in the dumping of
79 commodities in the poor countries of the global South, resulting in the disruption of
80 family farming and unemployment. Trade policies and arms deals further enrich the rich
81 and undercut economies in the global South without providing new contexts for
82 prosperity or hope. These realities, along with armed conflict, environmental spoilage and
83 natural disasters force people to find new homes within their own countries or across
84 national borders. Every region of the world is affected in some way by the global
85 economic divide.

86

87 Yet, while money and products easily flow across borders, the movement of people is
88 increasingly restricted, leading to concentrations of the poor along borders and, often, to

89 the building of literal and figurative walls of exclusion, notably around the rich nations of
90 the northern hemisphere and the affluent enclaves in Asia, Latin America, Africa, the
91 Middle East and the Pacific. While the legal and physical walls seek to exclude flows of
92 undocumented migrants, in fact, there is growing demand in wealthier nations for cheap
93 labor. Millions of migrants do enter—through formal guest worker programs or through
94 informal business networks that actively seek undocumented workers while maintaining
95 them in an exploitative non-citizen underclass. Many of those who are shut out or who
96 migrate without legal status are at the bottom of racial, ethnic and caste hierarchies. They
97 are often poor women and children. On either side of the divide, families are relegated to
98 intense human suffering, inadequate nutrition and health service, lack of educational
99 opportunities, and the reverberating, debilitating experience of oppression. Ironically, and
100 horribly, with regard to economic migrants, the rich say, “Come in, do our dirty work at
101 low wages, and then go away.” Significant percentages of the work force are migrants in
102 affluent countries, with the figure exceeding more than 50 percent in parts of the Middle
103 East. Such “guest workers” enjoy limited civil and human rights.

104

105 The global South is particularly concerned with the migration of people from rural to
106 urban areas and with the loss of young generations to other countries, the departures
107 dictated either by economic need or wooing by affluent societies seeking to fill jobs with
108 cheap labor. Such émigrés often do not want to leave; they may feel pressured by
109 promises of education, jobs, and economic security for themselves and their families.

110 They become entrapped in unjust global systems that drain the resources of poor,
111 southern countries for the benefit of the affluent societies of the global North.

112

113 III. Biblical Perspectives: Justice and Shared Resources

114 Attitudes toward and treatment of migrants are usually conditioned today, even within the
115 church, by nation-state considerations expressed in the language of “us” and “them”—or
116 “we” the homefolks and “they” the intruder/alien. A beneficent attitude sometimes
117 prevails: “‘We’” will allow X number of ‘them’ to come among ‘us’ provided they
118 acknowledge our generosity and become like us; so long, of course, as they do not
119 threaten our comfort.”

120

121 There are more biblically and theologically sound perspectives. In the biblical
122 understanding, it is not about us and them, but about one people of God, called to seek
123 justice and share equitably, at the very core of our spiritual and physical survival.

124 The Prophet Isaiah put the matter in context and posed the daunting question: “You
125 serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers...Such fasting that
126 you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is not the fast that I choose: to
127 loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free,
128 and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the
129 homeless poor into your house...” (Isaiah 58: 3-7) Not only does God’s understanding of
130 faithfulness entail the achievement of justice, but for the comfortable, the promise of
131 healing and salvation depends on that action. It was only when the people turned from

132 false religiosity to operative justice that they would receive the promise of spiritual
133 wholeness. “Then, the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched
134 places...you shall be like a watered garden...whose waters never fail.” (Isaiah 58:10-11).

135

136 The Hebrew Scriptures contains many references to “strangers” and “sojourners” among
137 the people of Israel and to provisions for treatment that reflect a tribal framework that had
138 stipulated rules for hospitality and also limits on the outsiders. However, the Books of
139 the Law, and to an even greater extent in the prophetic literature, concern for the stranger
140 focuses on justice and the sharing of resources that flow from the bounty of God. Ezekiel
141 anticipated a time when foreigners would share with the ancient Jewish nation all the
142 blessings of the land, which was understood to belong to God alone (Leviticus 25:23). In
143 a real sense, the ancient scriptures understand both the people of Israel and sojourners to
144 be aliens since the people of Israel had been sojourners in Egypt. God’s providence for
145 Israel extends to others (Psalm 146:9; Malachi 2:5), and everything, and everyone,
146 belongs to God (Psalm 24:1-2)

147

148 The breadth of God’s love permeates the New Testament; that love incorporates faith
149 community and goes beyond it. This is clearly emphasized in a short passage in I
150 Thessalonians (3:12), where St. Paul prays that God will provide the grace for Christians
151 to “abound in love for one another, and for all (people).”

152

Resolution Number: New

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General Board of Global Ministries

153 Christians do not approach the issue of migration from the perspective of tribe or nation,
154 but from within a faith community of love and welcome, a community that teaches and
155 expects hospitality to the poor, the homeless, and the oppressed. The Christian
156 community not only welcomes and embraces migrants but can be led by them toward
157 clearer understandings of justice and hospitality. Furthermore, many migrants in many
158 parts of the world today are themselves members of the Christian community, brothers
159 and sisters of the same baptism, gathered around the same sacramental table. And people
160 beyond the Christian community deserve no less hospitality than Christians extend to
161 themselves.

162

163 United Methodists should harbor no doubt about their responsibility to all those who live
164 here on the earth, especially the poor, the homeless, and the mistreated. John Wesley's
165 concern for the poor and outcast was constant and extended far beyond acts of charity. He
166 worked for just systems in which persons could with dignity stand on their own feet.

167 Wesley advocated just relationships within the social order. When some have great
168 abundance while others are homeless and hungry, the biblical task is not merely to help
169 those in need, but to seek justice—to shift resources and opportunity so that all are at the
170 table, all are fed, all experience the abundance of Gods' love both physically and
171 spiritually.

172

173 IV. Critical Issues Relating to Migration Today

Resolution Number: New

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General Board of Global Ministries

174 United Methodists and all Christians face numerous critical situations, causes, and effects
175 relating to migration today, especially in regard to war and economic systems and
176 policies that perpetuate poverty. As a global, denomination, The United Methodist
177 Church experiences the dilemmas of nations that both “send” and “receive” migrants.
178 Citizens and undocumented immigrants are within the church’s membership, as are
179 employers and migrant workers, police and detainees, and affluent and poor families. The
180 United Methodist family is a microcosm of migrant issues, a church that through God’s
181 grace seeks to respond to the needs of the most physically vulnerable and also address the
182 spiritual needs of the privileged.

183

184 The following are among the critical issues demanding attention:

- 185 1). The volume of refugees, asylum seekers, and persons displaced within their own
186 countries is growing, as are the numbers of economic migrants with and without
187 documentation.
- 188 2). Wealthy nations, especially those with decreasing populations, are increasingly
189 dependent upon migrants to maintain their current economies. They seek both high
190 skilled professionals and low wage workers for jobs in construction, health care,
191 agriculture, meat packing, and domestic service. The “receiving” nations or areas on a
192 world scale include Australia, Canada, Europe, Japan, New Zealand, the United States
193 and some countries of the Middle East (such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates,
194 Lebanon). Regional migration, often in the form of contract labor, is common in Brazil,
195 Hong Kong, Lebanon, South Africa, and South Korea and other nations.

- 196 3). The critical loss of skilled workers and potential leaders in “sending” countries
197 undermines the future economic and social advancement of those societies. Doctors from
198 poorer nations can often earn more in the U.S. as a nurse than as a physician in their
199 country of origin. The “brain drain,” often deliberately encouraged by rich countries for
200 their own benefit, affects teachers, engineers, medical personnel, researchers, and
201 technicians.
- 202 4). Old wars and territorial occupations have left a critical migration crisis and new wars
203 add to the problem. This can be illustrated in the Middle East where many Palestinians
204 remain as refugees more than a half century since they lost their homes in Israel. In recent
205 years, millions of Iraqis have fled their country, adding to displaced population of the
206 greater Middle East.
- 207 5). The passage of stricter enforcement of anti-immigrant legislation and the building of
208 exclusionary walls, often in response to increased migration, intensifies cultural tensions,
209 marked by racial, class, and religious “backlash.” Restrictive policies also intensify
210 migrant resistance based on fear of arrest and deportation, substandard wages, physical
211 and mental abuse, and even death for crossing a border. Migrants fall prey to trafficking
212 for economic or sexual purposes and sometimes become virtual slaves in their new place
213 of residence.
- 214 6). The increasing percentage of migrant women, who now make up half of the
215 international migrant population and as much as 70 to 80 percent in some countries.
216 Many of these women are domestic workers, who may raise other peoples’ children while

Resolution Number: New

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General Board of Global Ministries

217 being separated from their own. Some women and girls who migrant are subjected to
218 physical and sexual abuse and fear reprisals if they complain.

219 7). Migration today divides families across generations. Filipino contract workers in
220 Saudi Arabia may serve in those countries for their entire careers, and then watch their
221 children step into their roles as they retire. Families are also divided by deportation of
222 undocumented parents, while children hold citizenship.

223 8) Remittances (sending “home” the paycheck) have become major sources of financing
224 for poor countries; revenues that threaten to undercut aid assistance from rich nations.

225 The monies migrants send home is massive, an estimated \$230 billion in 2005. Some
226 nations, including the Philippines or El Salvador, depend on remittances to support the
227 financial system. In an effort to escape responsibility for the sharing of resources, some
228 officials in the global North tout remittances as replacements for development aid. This
229 attitude violates the spirit of the Millennium Development Goals and other United
230 Nations accords. Through international instruments, northern nations have set the goal of
231 providing 0.7% of their gross national product in development aid to poor nations, as well
232 to cancel some debt and alter trade policies in ways that benefit poor nations.

233

234 VI. Response of the Church

235 The United Methodist Church commits itself to:

236 1). Provide real help for refugees, asylees and migrants.

Resolution Number: New

Financial Implications: None

General Board of Global Ministries

237 2). Engage in strong, coordinated advocacy on migration issues and on behalf of actions
238 that overcome poverty, war and other causes leading to the displacement and
239 marginalization of people.

240 3). Organize through institutional channels and prepare educational resources for the
241 achievement of these objectives.

242

243 Assistance includes:

244 1). Relief to refugees and displaced persons around the world, including the resettlement,
245 when possible, of refugees through congregations and through economic development
246 programs for both those who permanently resettle and those who may return to
247 homelands, this work to be coordinated by the United Methodist Committee on Relief in
248 collaboration with all other levels and organizations of the church;

249 2). Congregational and annual conference programs that humanely respond to migrants
250 within their borders--defending their human rights, advancing just immigration policies
251 by national governments, and tending to their spiritual, material, and legal needs as
252 required, with the General Boards of Global Ministries and Church and Society, in
253 collaboration with other general agencies, responsible for resource materials to help in
254 equipping conferences and congregations for these ministries;

255 3). Education of church members and communities on the causes and realities of
256 migration, including international treaty commitments, the issues of economic and
257 environmental justice, and the obstacles to a just, peaceable world created by anti-
258 immigrant racism and xenophobia;

Resolution Number: New

Financial Implications: None

General Board of Global Ministries

- 259 4). Building bridges between diverse races, ethnicities, religions and cultures, opposing
260 violence against and abuse of migrants;
- 261 5). Work with civic and legal organizations to help communities to alleviate social
262 conditions caused by harsh immigration laws and heavy-handed national security
263 measures; and
- 264 6). Recognizing the right of sanctuary in any United Methodist local church for migrants
265 subject to detention or deportation by government security forces.
266
- 267 Advocacy includes promotion of:
- 268 1). Just and equitable trade and development policies that support human rights and
269 counteract the root causes of migration such as war and militarization, environment
270 spoilage, and corporate greed;
- 271 2). Engagement with other Christian and religious organizations in North-South
272 dialogues, study of international economic policies, and joint action;
- 273 3). Protection for uprooted women and children from all forms of violence and abuse,
274 including full legal protection of children in situations of armed conflict;
- 275 4). Unification of families divided by borders and legal status wherever this occurs;
- 276 5). Denunciation of xenophobic and racist reactions against newcomers;
- 277 6). Defense of civil liberties regardless of the legal status of persons;
- 278 7). Abolishment of governmental anti-terrorism policies and practices that criminalize or
279 profile refugees and immigrants as threats to national security; and

Page

Resolution Number: New

Financial Implications: None

General Board of Global Ministries

280 8). Adoption by all nations of the United Nations International Convention on the
281 Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and their Families, and mobilize to
282 promote compliance with the terms of the convention.

283

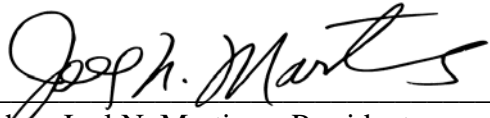
284 Institutional Organization includes:

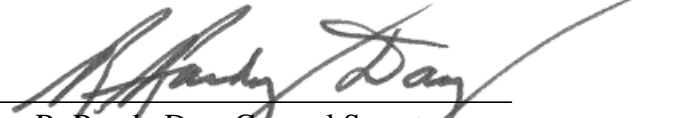
285 Continuation of a United Methodist Task Force on Immigration to lead the church in a
286 prophetic response to refugee and migrant issues by interpreting official policy in light of
287 current realities, coordinating vision, analysis, education and action. Said task force will
288 be convened by two bishops designated by the Council of Bishops, organized and staffed
289 by the General Boards of Church and Society and Global Ministries, and composed of
290 representatives from all appropriate general agencies (GCORR, GBOD, GCFA and
291 others), as well as persons from jurisdictions, central conferences, annual conferences,
292 partner churches, denominational ethnic/racial caucuses, and ethnic and language
293 ministry plans as situations dictate. General agencies will each bear the cost of their
294 participation in the task force and those agencies may underwrite the costs of non-agency
295 participation as needs require and resources permit.

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