

UMC For Further Study

Welcoming the Migrant to the United States
The United Methodist Church 2008 Book of Resolutions
Adopted by General Conference on May 1, 2008

The Historical Context

From the dawn of creation human beings have migrated across the earth. The history of the United States is a migration narrative of families and individuals seeking safety, economic betterment, and freedom of religious and cultural expression. The reasons for those who immigrated willingly are numerous and varied depending on the context, but what all immigrants share is the promise of what they believe lies in another land other than their own. Migrants today continue to travel to North America because of the effects of globalization, dislocation, economic scarcity, persecution, and other reasons.

The arrival of migrants to the United States from so many parts of the world has also meant that there is a diversity of cultures and worldviews. The diversity of cultures, worldviews, and languages has placed an enormous strain upon migrants. To effectively deal with this trauma and ease the process of acculturation, migrants should be encouraged to preserve strong cultural and familial ties to their culture of origin.

The arrival of new cultures has also felt threatening to U.S. citizens and this has too often resulted in conflict and even violence. Throughout the history of the United States, the most recently-arrived group of migrants has often been a target of racism, marginalization, and violence. We regret any and all violence committed against migrants in the past and we resolve, as followers of Jesus, to work to eliminate racism and violence directed towards newly arriving migrants to the United States.

The Biblical and Theological Context

Reflecting upon the Scriptures, we are reminded that United Methodists are a global church. In the United States, we may be descendents of economic immigrants or forced migrants, or we may have recently arrived in the U.S. We may have formal documents proving U.S. citizenship, or we may be undocumented. Regardless of legal status or nationality, we are all connected through Christ to one another. Paul reminds us that when “one member suffers, all members suffer” as well (1 Corinthians 12:26). The solidarity we share through Christ eliminates the boundaries and barriers which exclude and isolate. Therefore, the sojourners we are called to love are our brothers and sisters, our mothers and fathers, our sons and daughters; indeed, they are us.

Throughout Scripture the people of God are called to love sojourners in our midst, treating them “as the citizen among you” and loving them as we do ourselves (Leviticus 19:33-34). Love for the sojourner is birthed out of the shared experience the Israelites had as a people in sojourn searching for the Promised Land. The attitudes and actions required of God’s people were to emanate from the reflection of their liberation from slavery by God’s hand. As the people of God were liberated from oppression, they too were charged to be instruments of redemption in the lives of the most vulnerable in their

midst – the sojourner (Exodus 22:21, 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19, 16:12, 24:18, 24:22).

In the New Testament Jesus' life begins as a refugee to Africa when he and his family flee to Egypt to escape Herod's infanticide (Matthew 2:13-18). Jesus fully identifies with the sojourner to the point that to welcome the sojourner is to welcome Jesus himself (Matthew 25:35). Jesus teaches us to show special concern for the poor and oppressed who come to our land seeking survival and peace.

In Scripture, Jesus continually manifests compassion for the vulnerable and the poor. Jesus incarnated hospitality as he welcomed people and ministered to their greatest need. Jesus' presence on earth initiated the Kingdom reality of a new social order based on love, grace, justice, inclusion, mercy, and egalitarianism, which was meant to replace the old order, characterized by nepotism, racism, classism, sexism, and exclusion. The broken immigration system in the United States and the xenophobic responses to migrants reflect the former social order. The calling of the people of God is to advocate for the creation of a new immigration system that reflects Jesus' beloved community.

The fear and anguish so many migrants in the United States live under are due to federal raids, indefinite detention, and deportations which tear apart families and create an atmosphere of panic. Millions of immigrants are denied legal entry to the U.S. due to quotas and race and class barriers, even as employers seek their labor. U.S. policies, as well as economic and political conditions in their home countries, often force migrants to leave their homes. With the legal avenues closed, immigrants who come in order to support their families must live in the shadows and in intense exploitation and fear. In the face of these unjust laws and the systematic deportation of migrants instituted by the Department of Homeland Security, God's people must stand in solidarity with the migrants in our midst.

In Scripture, sojourners are also identified as heralds or messengers bringing good news. This is seen in many stories of the Bible, including:

- Abraham who welcomed three visitors and then was promised a child even though Sarah was past the age of bearing children (Genesis 18:-11),
- Rahab who hid the spies from Israel and whose family was ultimately spared (Joshua 2:1-16),
- the widow at Zarephath who gave Elijah her last meal and received food and ultimately healing for her dying son (1 Kings 17:7-24), and
- Zaccheus who, upon welcoming Jesus into his home, promised to share half his possessions with the poor and repay those he stole from four times the amount owed. As Jesus entered Zaccheus' home he proclaimed that salvation had come to his house (Luke 19:1-10).

All of these stories give evidence to the words of the writer of Hebrews who advises the listeners to “not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (13:2). God's people are called to welcome the sojourner not only because of God's commands to do so, but because God's people need to hear the good news of the gospel incarnated in their stories and in their lives.

Welcoming the sojourner is so vital to the expression of Christian faith that to engage in this form of hospitality is to participate in our own salvation.

There is theologically and historically an implied nature of mutuality in migration. Both the migrant and the native are meant to benefit from migration. Welcoming the migrant is not only an act of mission, it is an opportunity to receive God's grace. The globalization of international economies and the continuing movement of migrants have created an increasingly diversified U.S. population and should be reflected in United Methodist congregations and national church leadership.

Therefore, The United Methodist Church understands that at the center of Christian faithfulness to Scripture is the call we have been given to love and welcome the sojourner. We call upon all United Methodist churches to welcome newly arriving migrants in their communities, to love them as we do ourselves, to treat them as one of our native-born, to see in them the presence of the incarnated Jesus, and to show hospitality to the migrants in our midst believing that through their presence we are receiving the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Current Context

Immigration to the United States has changed in the last twenty years largely because the world has changed. Globalization has lessened the geographical distance between the poor and affluent, but yet, it has also greatly exacerbated the chasm between those with access to resources and those denied that same access. Vast inequities between the global north and south are a continuing source of conflict and a draw of resources and people from the south to north. Globalization has localized issues which used to be hidden or detached by geographical boundaries, but has not created forms of accountability or mediated the necessity of cross-cultural reconciliation between those victimized by international economic policies and those who benefit from them. Global media enable the poor of the global south to see the lifestyles of the affluent in the global north, while rarely seeing the intense poverty that also exists there. This creates both tensions and a draw to attain that same lifestyle.

Although unregulated trade and investment have economically benefited some, many more have been sentenced to a lifetime of poverty and marginalization. In poorer countries natural resources have been removed by transnational corporations which have no stake in the continuing welfare of the local people, the enhancement of their cultural traditions, or their ecological environment. The lack of these resources often leads to a drastic reduction in jobs, wages, and labor protections. Public social benefits are eliminated and the nation sinks deeper into debt as it turns to such institutions as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.¹ As the affluent North continues to expand its wealth, this expansion occurs at the expense of the impoverished South. Every region in the world is affected in some way by the global economic divide. Yet, while money and products easily flow across borders, the movement of people who have been forced to migrate because of intolerable economic conditions is increasingly restricted.

When those, whose livelihoods have been eradicated in favor of corporate globalization, attempt to sojourn to North America to work and provide for their families, they receive a mixed message that is confusing and ultimately oppressive. Immigrants have moved into areas of the United States where there are economic opportunities that U.S. citizens have largely ignored. Employers often prefer undocumented workers in order to increase profit margins. Until all jobs provide a livable wage employers will be able to pit U.S. citizens against undocumented workers in a downward spiral that undermines the labor rights for all.

Because the U.S. immigration system has not kept up with the changing pace of migration and the U.S. economy, the population of undocumented migrants has grown dramatically. Yet, the growing population of undocumented migrants has not yet been harmful to most U.S. workers because they are not competing for the same jobs. While the United States labor force is growing older and more educated, the need for unskilled workers remains strong. The Migration Policy Institute reports that the economic necessities for repairing the immigration system are clear as they predict by 2030, immigrant workers will comprise between one-third and one-half of the U.S. labor force.² Testifying before the Senate Committee on Aging in 2003, then-Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Alan Greenspan, called for increased numbers of migrants to sustain an aging labor force and a continued economic vacuum among low-skilled workers.

Although the economic necessity of migrant workers is clear, any immigration or economic system which calls for a perpetual class of second class workers cannot be supported by people of faith. Undocumented immigrants are exploited for their labor and economic contribution to the United States. They are denied their rights to collectively bargain for livable wages and safe working conditions, and they are shut out of access to the social services of which they support through their difficult labor. Any reform of the immigration system must also allow for the full protections of all workers which includes the opportunity to gain legal status for all migrants.

Even though migrants have proven a tremendous benefit to the United States' economy, migrants have been systematically excluded from receiving any benefits. Excluding access to health care promotes an increase in the demand on emergency rooms to provide that daily care or it forces migrants who are fearful to seek medical care to live in continued pain and suffering. The United States benefits from migrant labor, but migrants have been forced to live in the shadows, unable to fully contribute or receive appropriate care.

Immigration: A Human Rights Issue

Since 9/11 the debate surrounding immigration has unfortunately been framed as an issue of national security. All of this emphasis on border security has not stemmed the flow of undocumented migration even though the United States has poured millions of dollars into militarizing the border.

The use of local law enforcement as immigration agents should be stopped as well. When local law enforcement officials engage in immigration enforcement, migrants are often unwilling to report crimes and are forced to live in situations where they are exploited, abused, and victimized.

All nations have the right to secure their borders, but the primary concern for Christians should be the welfare of immigrants. Between 1995 and 2004 more than 2,640 migrants have died crossing the border between the United States and Mexico, and since 2004 more than one migrant has died per day.³

Raids of workplaces, homes and other social places have often violated the civil liberties of migrants. Migrants should be given due process and access to adequate legal representation. Due to these raids and the ensuing indefinite detentions and deportations that follow them, families have been ripped apart and the migrant community has been forced to live in a constant state of fear.

To refuse to welcome migrants to this country and to stand by in silence while families are separated, individual freedoms are ignored, and the migrant community in the United States is demonized by members of Congress and the media, is complicity to sin.

A Call to Action

The United Methodist Church affirms the worth, dignity and inherent value and rights of every person regardless of their nationality or legal status. United Methodist churches throughout the United States are urged to build bridges with migrants in their local communities, to learn from them, celebrate their presence in the United States and recognize and appreciate the contributions in all areas of life that migrants bring. We call upon all United Methodist churches to engage in the following:

- Advocate for legislation that will uphold the civil and human rights of all migrants in the United States and provide an opportunity to attain legal status for all undocumented migrants for those currently in the United States as well as for those arriving in the future.
- Begin English as a Second Language classes as a part of ministry to migrant communities and advocate for federal and state support of expanded ESL classes.
- Denounce and oppose the rise of xenophobic, racist, and violent reactions against migrants in the United States, and to support all efforts to build relationships between people, instead of building walls, between diverse ethnicities and cultures.
- Oppose the building of a wall between the United States and Mexico, which the communities of both sides of the border are in opposition to.
- Call the United States government to immediately cease all arrests, detainment, and deportations of undocumented immigrants, including children, solely based upon their immigration status until a fair and comprehensive immigration reform is passed.

- Provide wherever possible pastoral care and crisis intervention to refugees and newly arrived migrants, identifying and responding compassionately to their spiritual, material, and legal needs.
- Work with civic and legal organizations to support migrant communities affected by harsh immigration laws and over-reaching national security measures.
- Support those churches that prayerfully choose to offer sanctuary to undocumented migrants facing deportation.
- Continue the work of the Immigration Task Force composed of staff from the general boards and agencies, representatives of the Council of Bishops, and members of caucuses and national plans that was created by the resolution, *Opposition to the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Resolution Act* (2004 Book of Resolutions, #118).

Further, The United Methodist Church is urged to advocate for the comprehensive reform of the U.S. immigration system. Any legislation to reform the U.S. immigration system must affirm the worth, dignity and inherent value and rights of migrants, and must also include:

- An opportunity for legal status for all undocumented migrants. Any pathway created for undocumented migrants should have minimal obstacles and those requirements should not be designed to preclude migrants from eligibility for legalization.
- Clearing the backlogs and reunifying families separated by migration or detainment.
- An increase in the number of visas for short-term workers to come into the United States to work in a safe, legal, and orderly way. Opportunities for legalization should be available for those who wish to remain permanently.
- The protections of all workers who come to stay for a certain period of time as well as for those who stay permanently. The right to bargain for higher wages, to protest against poor working conditions, and to preserve their human rights should be maintained by all workers, documented and undocumented alike.
- Elimination of privately-operated detention centers, which are not regulated by the federal or state governments.⁴
- Elimination of indefinite detention, incarceration of children, and the expanding prison population, which also benefits privately-owned detention centers and prisons.
- Preservation of due process and access to courts and to adequate legal representation for all migrants regardless of legal status.

¹ Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia D. *Healing a Broken World: Globalization and God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, p. 28.

² B. Lindsay Lowell, Julia Gelatt & Jeanne Batalova, *Immigrants and Labor Force Trends: The Future, Past, and Present*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, July 2006, p. 1.

³ Wayne Cornelius, *Evaluating Enhanced US Border Enforcement*. Migration Policy Institute, May 2004.

⁴ In the 2004 Book of Resolutions, “Prison Industrial Complex,” it states that “Many states where private prisons are now operating have no laws regulating their operations (including health, safety, security, legal access for prisoners, and disciplinary policies). Many private prisons are under no obligation to ensure access to information about prisoners held in them or how they are classified, and often regard this as proprietary information.”

Welcoming the Migrant to the U.S. – Discussion Questions

1. *Throughout the history of the United States, the most recently-arrived group of migrants has often been a target of racism, marginalization, and violence. We regret any and all violence committed against migrants in the past and we resolve, as followers of Jesus, to work to eliminate racism and violence directed towards newly arriving migrants to the United States.*

The resolution views treatment of immigrants as a racial justice issue. Share your own experiences—locally or in the media—of how racism is a factor in the portrayal and treatment of immigrants in the US and in our church today. What are some ways we can address this in our own communities?

2. *Reflecting upon the Scriptures, we are reminded that United Methodists are a global church. In the United States, we may be descendents of economic immigrants or forced migrants, or we may have recently arrived in the U.S. We may have formal documents proving U.S. citizenship, or we may be undocumented. Regardless of legal status or nationality, we are all connected through Christ to one another...The sojourners we are called to love are our brothers and sisters...indeed, they are us.*

We are reminded that United Methodists are in both migrant sending and receiving countries, and immigrants, both documented and undocumented, are members of our church. While migrants have been made to be the “other”, this reminds us that they are “us”—part of one family. How does this challenge dominant views of immigrants? How does it challenge our own practices as individuals and as the church?

3. *Millions of immigrants are denied legal entry to the U.S. due to quotas and race and class barriers, even as employers seek their labor. U.S. policies, as well as economic and political conditions in their home countries, often force migrants to leave their homes. With the legal avenues closed, immigrants who come in order to support their families must live in the shadows and in intense exploitation and fear. In the face of these unjust laws and the systematic deportation of migrants instituted by the Department of Homeland Security, God’s people must stand in solidarity with the migrants in our midst.*

A common question that US citizens ask is “why don’t immigrants obey the laws by coming in legally?” As the resolution notes, there is a push of precarious economic and political conditions at home, and a pull of US employers seeking labor for millions of migrants, yet very few slots for legal entry (often with 20 year waits). If we are called to reach out to migrants in our midst, what will it take to help them “come out of the shadows” and share the same rights as US citizens? Why do you think this is such a contentious issue?

4. *Any immigration or economic system which calls for a perpetual class of second class workers cannot be supported by people of faith. Immigrants are exploited for their labor and economic contribution to the United States, and are being intentionally marginalized, denied their rights to collectively bargain for livable wages and safe working conditions, and shut out of equal access to the social services of which they support through their difficult labor. Any reform of the immigration system must also allow for the full protections of all workers which includes equal access to gain legal status for all migrants.*

How does the film “Made in L.A.” help to illustrate this point, that a central aspect of migration is the exploitation of migrant labor? How are migrants themselves organizing for labor rights, and what role can others play as allies?

5. *Since 9/11 the debate surrounding immigration has unfortunately been framed as an issue of national security. ...All of this emphasis on border security has not stemmed the flow of undocumented migration even though the US has poured millions of dollars into militarizing the border...All nations have the right to secure their borders, but the primary concern for Christians should be the welfare of immigrants.*

Much of the rationale for an increase in policing, border security, raids and deportations is that of National Security. Yet the majority of immigrants are not criminals and the millions spent on enforcement has not impacted flows of migrants. How would policy differ if viewed from the lens of human rights for all, rather than protection of “us” from “them?” How does our faith challenge us in this context?

6. Read through “A Call to Action” at the end of the resolution.

What are actions that you can do as an individual, a congregation, and within the larger community? What is a first step your congregation can take towards action?

Regarding immigration legislation, what are some of the principles affirmed by the United Methodist Church regarding any new federal immigration policy? How do these compare with current proposals or debates in the media? Discuss your reactions to these principles. Where do they challenge you? What are the tensions between Gospel mandates and our lived realities? How can we continue to wrestle with these tensions?

Adopted by General Conference, April 29, 2008. Petition submitted by General Board of Global Ministries in conjunction with UMC Task Force on Immigration

Global Migration and the Quest for Justice

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

Social Principles, The United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church has frequently addressed general and specific topics related to migration. The Social Principles affirm:

- 1). “We commit ourselves as a Church to the achievement of a world community that is a fellowship of persons who honestly love one another. We pledge ourselves to seek the meaning of the gospel in all issues that divide people and threaten the growth of world community.” (64)
- 2). “In order to provide basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, education, health care and other necessities, ways must be found to share more equitably the resources of the world.” (58).
- 3). “We advocate for the rights of all migrants and applaud their efforts toward responsibility self-organization and self-determination.”(163F)

Human migration is as old as human history. Individuals, families, tribes, and nations have been on move since the days of Abraham and Sarah and before. Throughout the centuries, political and economic factors, including wars; health and environmental challenges; and racism, xenophobia, and religious discrimination have at times uprooted people and at others lured them to new venues across continents and oceans as well as national and ethnic boundaries.

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

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

I. Contemporary Migrants

Four categories of contemporary migrants can be delineated:

Refugees—persons outside of their country of origin who are unable or unwilling to return for fear of persecution based on race, religion, ethnicity, political affiliation or opinion; official “refugees” are so recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is charged by the international community to oversee service to, and protection of, refugees.

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

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

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

Economic migrants—are people who move from one country to another to find work. Most frequently they seek to flee from poverty to economic opportunity, and often permanently relocated so they may feed their families. Some are allowed into more affluent nations as immigrants; some enter without documentation and may be welcomed in times of labor shortages and deported in times of economic downturn or public disapproval. Such migrants are among the most vulnerable in any society; many are women and children who become the objects of abuse and brutality. One subcategory in this classification consists of migrant workers, people who move from place to place, often with the agricultural cycle, to find employment. Some return on periodic or eventual permanent basis to their homelands; others make domestic and other ties in places of employment and wish to remain. The number of current economic migrants is difficult to calculate. Some estimates run as high as 100 million globally, with large numbers in the affluent regions of North America and Europe.

II. A Context of Migration

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

Yet, while money and products easily flow across borders, the movement of people is increasingly restricted, leading to concentrations of the poor along borders and, often, to the building of literal and figurative walls of exclusion, notably around the rich nations of the

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

The global South is particularly concerned with the migration of people from rural to urban areas and with the loss of young generations to other countries, the departures dictated either by economic need or wooing by affluent societies seeking to fill jobs with cheap labor. Such émigrés often do not want to leave; they may feel pressured by promises of education, jobs, and economic security for themselves and their families. They become entrapped in unjust global systems that drain the resources of poor, southern countries for the benefit of the affluent societies of the global North.

III. Biblical Perspectives: Justice and Shared Resources

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

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

The Prophet Isaiah put the matter in context and posed the daunting question: “You serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers...Such fasting that you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house...” (Isaiah 58: 3-7) Not only does God’s understanding of faithfulness entail the achievement of justice, but for the comfortable, the promise of healing and salvation depends on that action. It was only when the people turned from false religiosity to operative justice that they would receive the promise of spiritual wholeness. “Then, the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your needs in parched places...you shall be like a watered garden...whose waters never fail.” (Isaiah 58:10-11).

The Hebrew Scriptures contains many references to “strangers” and “sojourners” among the

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

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

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

United Methodists should harbor no doubt about their responsibility to all those who live here on the earth, especially the poor, the homeless, and the mistreated. John Wesley's concern for the poor and outcast was constant and extended far beyond acts of charity. He worked for just systems in which persons could with dignity stand on their own feet. Wesley advocated just relationships within the social order. When some have great abundance while others are homeless and hungry, the biblical task is not merely to help those in need, but to seek justice—to shift resources and opportunity so that all are at the table, all are fed, all experience the abundance of God's love both physically and spiritually.

IV. Critical Issues Relating to Migration Today

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

The following are among the critical issues demanding attention:

1). The volume of refugees, asylum seekers, and persons displaced within their own countries is

growing, as are the numbers of economic migrants with and without documentation.

2). Wealthy nations, especially those with decreasing populations, are increasingly dependent upon migrants to maintain their current economies. They seek both high skilled professionals and low wage workers for jobs in construction, health care, agriculture, meat packing, and domestic service. The “receiving” nations or areas on a world scale include Australia, Canada, Europe, Japan, New Zealand, the United States and some countries of the Middle East (such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon). Regional migration, often in the form of contract labor, is common in Brazil, Hong Kong, Lebanon, South Africa, and South Korea and other nations.

3). The critical loss of skilled workers and potential leaders in “sending” countries undermines the future economic and social advancement of those societies. Doctors from poorer nations can often earn more in the U.S. as a nurse than as a physician in their country of origin. The “brain drain,” often deliberately encouraged by rich countries for their own benefit, affects teachers, engineers, medical personnel, researchers, and technicians.

4). Old wars and territorial occupations have left a critical migration crisis and new wars add to the problem. This can be illustrated in the Middle East where many Palestinians remain as refugees more than a half century since they lost their homes in Israel. In recent years, millions of Iraqis have fled their country, adding to displaced population of the greater Middle East.

5). The passage of stricter enforcement of anti-immigrant legislation and the building of exclusionary walls, often in response to increased migration, intensifies cultural tensions, marked by racial, class, and religious “backlash.” Restrictive policies also intensify migrant resistance based on fear of arrest and deportation, substandard wages, physical and mental abuse, and even death for crossing a border. Migrants fall prey to trafficking for economic or sexual purposes and sometimes become virtual slaves in their new place of residence.

6). The increasing percentage of migrant women, who now make up half of the international migrant population and as much as 70 to 80 percent in some countries. Many of these women are domestic workers, who may raise other peoples’ children while being separated from their own. Some women and girls who migrant are subjected to physical and sexual abuse and fear reprisals if they complain.

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

8) Remittances (sending “home” the paycheck) have become major sources of financing for poor countries; revenues that threaten to undercut aid assistance from rich nations. The monies migrants send home is massive, an estimated \$230 billion in 2005. Some nations, including the Philippines or El Salvador, depend on remittances to support the financial system. In an effort to escape responsibility for the sharing of resources, some officials in the global North tout remittances as replacements for development aid. This attitude violates the spirit of the Millennium Development Goals and other United Nations accords. Through international instruments, northern nations have set the goal of providing 0.7% of their gross national product in development aid to poor nations, as well to cancel some debt and alter trade policies in ways that benefit poor nations.

V. Response of the Church

The United Methodist Church commits itself to:

- 1). Provide real help for refugees, asylees and migrants.
- 2). Engage in strong, coordinated advocacy on migration issues and on behalf of actions that overcome poverty, war and other causes leading to the displacement and marginalization of people.
- 3). Organize through institutional channels and prepare educational resources for the achievement of these objectives.

Assistance includes:

- 1). Relief to refugees and displaced persons around the world, including the resettlement, when possible, of refugees through congregations and through economic development programs for both those who permanently resettle and those who may return to homelands, this work to be coordinated by the United Methodist Committee on Relief in collaboration with all other levels and organizations of the church;
- 2). Congregational and annual conference programs that humanely respond to migrants within their borders--defending their human rights, advancing just immigration policies by national governments, and tending to their spiritual, material, and legal needs as required, with the General Boards of Global Ministries and Church and Society, in collaboration with other general agencies, responsible for resource materials to help in equipping conferences and congregations for these ministries;
- 3). Education of church members and communities on the causes and realities of migration, including international treaty commitments, the issues of economic and environmental justice, and the obstacles to a just, peaceable world created by anti-immigrant racism and xenophobia;
- 4). Building bridges between diverse races, ethnicities, religions and cultures, opposing violence against and abuse of migrants;
- 5). Work with civic and legal organizations to help communities to alleviate social conditions caused by harsh immigration laws and heavy-handed national security measures; and
- 6). Recognizing the right of sanctuary in any United Methodist local church for migrants subject to detention or deportation by government security forces.

Advocacy includes promotion of:

- 1). Just and equitable trade and development policies that support human rights and counteract the root causes of migration such as war and militarization, environment spoilage, and corporate greed;
- 2). Engagement with other Christian and religious organizations in North-South dialogues, study of international economic policies, and joint action;
- 3). Protection for uprooted women and children from all forms of violence and abuse, including full legal protection of children in situations of armed conflict;
- 4). Unification of families divided by borders and legal status wherever this occurs;
- 5). Denunciation of xenophobic and racist reactions against newcomers;
- 6). Defense of civil liberties regardless of the legal status of persons;
- 7). Abolishment of governmental anti-terrorism policies and practices that criminalize or profile refugees and immigrants as threats to national security; and
- 8). Adoption by all nations of the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and their Families, and mobilize to promote compliance with the terms of the convention.

Institutional Organization includes:

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

Global Migration and the Quest for Justice

Study Questions:

1. This 2008 General Conference resolution points to systemic causes of migration linked to economic and political policies that intensify divisions of “*abundance and poverty and racial/ethnic/religious identities and exclusion. The current global economic system reflects an expectation that many people will live in poverty, or have their nations torn by conflict, so that others may live in abundance.*” Migration is most often driven by a “global economic divide.” When people move in response to poverty and war, systems and walls are erected to contain, classify and exclude.

Where do you see this happening in the world? Are you familiar with US or other governmental policies that affect migration from Global South to Global North? How does this challenge us to address economic and political policies, as well as immigration policy, in seeking solutions?

2. The resolution describes a global labor system where wealthy nations (US, Europe, Japan...) have a growing demand for cheap labor, often met through exploitative guest worker programs or by permitting undocumented workers to hold jobs while relegating them in a “non-citizen underclass” denies civil and human rights. Race, class and gender are all factors in the global labor hierarchy. “The rich say, “Come in, do our dirty work at low wages, and then go away.”

How does the film “Made in LA” reflect this global division of labor? What race, class and gender factors are present here? How are economic migrants such as the women in the film responding to this reality? In what other parts of the world do you see this labor hierarchy in place? For those with the security of legal status (citizens, residents), what are the moral challenges in terms of becoming allies of exploitation?

3. “*Attitudes toward migrants are usually conditioned today, even within the church, by nation-state considerations expressed in the language of ‘us’ and ‘them’—or ‘we’ the home folks and ‘they’ the intruder/alien. A beneficent attitude sometimes prevails: ‘We’ will allow x number of ‘them’ to come among ‘us’ provided they acknowledge our generosity and become like us; so long, of course, as they do not threaten our comfort.’ In the biblical understanding, it is not about us and them, but about one people of God, called to seek justice and share equitably, at the very core of our spiritual and physical survival...For the comfortable, the promise of healing and salvation depends on (action for justice)...Christians do not approach the issue of migration from the perspective of tribe or nation, but from within a faith community of love and welcome...*” While the Hebrew Testament speaks in the framework of a tribe (the Israelites) with the mandate to “welcome the stranger”, Christ calls us as Christians to drop barriers of tribe and nation and to embrace all as children of God.

How does this shift the predominant theology around migration? What are the demands for us as Christians who have national allegiances and identities yet are members of a global church that equally values all God's people? Think about current immigration policies in the US: how would they look different from within this biblical starting point?

4. *“When some have great abundance while others are homeless and hungry, the biblical task is not merely to help those in need, but to seek justice—to shift resources and opportunity so that all are at the table, all are fed, all experience the abundance of God's love both physically and spiritually.”*

What are the implications of a more equal distribution of the world's resources? What policies may be needed to address the gap in wealth between North and South? What are the moral implications of the fact that the US consumes 85 per cent of the world's wealth? In what ways might the Holy Spirit empower us to overcome fears around material security, so we can reach out to others in love?