Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounter with New Neighbors

Approved by
The 211th General Assembly (1999)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Developed by
The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy
of the General Assembly Council

Published by
The Office of the General Assembly
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202-1396

Printed in the United States of America

Cover design by the
Office of the General Assembly
Department of Communication and Technology

Additional copies available from
Presbyterian Distribution Services (PDS)
100 Witherspoon Street,
Louisville, KY 40202-1396,
by calling 1-800-524-2612 (PDS)
or OGA Sales 1-888-219-6700

Please specify PDS order #OGA-99-029

October 1999

To: Middle Governing Bodies and Their Resource Centers, Appropriate Networks Related to Ministry with or Advocacy for Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Targeted Sessions in Areas with High Immigrant Populations, Libraries of the Theological Seminaries

Dear Friends:

The 211th General Assembly (1999) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), has approved this Study and Reflection Guide on "Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounters with New Neighbors." It is presented for the guidance and edification of the whole Christian Church and the society to which it ministers; and will be used to determine procedures and program for the ministry divisions and staff of the General Assembly. It is recommended for consideration and study by other governing bodies (sessions, presbyteries, and synods). This study and reflection guide is commended to the free Christian conscience of all congregations and the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) for prayerful study, dialogue, and action.

This resolution is the result of a development process that included wide consultation and participation throughout the church, drawing upon biblical sources and insights from the Reformed tradition in giving renewed definition to Presbyterian understandings concerning immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The resolution begins with a call to confession for ministry and mission that has fallen short of the needs around us while at the same time challenging the whole church to extend ministries of hospitality and public advocacy for all. A concerted effort was undertaken to bring together past policies of the General Assembly on these issues so they might be accessible in one place with a clear expression of the theological and ethical principles as well as the policy principles that have guided the church's program. They are offered to the church that the church might commit to rediscover its identity as a church of the stranger.

The resolution comes to you with a study and action guide, designed for personal and class use, in the hope that we may all become more aware of our call to be God's people in our daily lives and work.

Yours in Christ's Service,

Clifton Kirkpatrick
State Clerk of the General Assembly

CONTENTS

RESOLUTION ON "TRANSFORMATION OF CHURCHES AND SOCIETY THROUGH ENCOUNTER WITH NEW NEIGHBORS"

Acts 10 and 11:1–18: The Account of Peter and Cornelius.

In this text, we read the story of Cornelius' conversion to Christian faith and Peter's decisive change concerning the church's mission to the Gentiles. This was a pivotal event in the formation of the early Christian Church. Prior to this event, Peter had not envisioned the possibility of including Gentiles in the Christian community. Now, through his encounter with Cornelius that God initiated, Peter was transformed. The scales fell from his eyes, and Peter recognized that Gentiles were equal in the sight of God. Cornelius was an outsider, religiously and politically. Yet it was through him, not one of Peter's daily companions, that Peter was led to see the crucified Christ in a new way. New avenues for mission and ministry were opened. Without Peter's encounter with this stranger, the history of the early church might have taken a different course. So it is that our churches today are called out from our familiar ways and challenged to encounter the outsiders with an anticipation of the transformation that Christ continues to bring about.

Proverbs 31:8–9.
Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.
Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Here, the mother gives advice to her son, the king, about his responsibility to be a righteous judge. The heart of this understanding of justice is to advocate for those persons who are rendered mute, and to protect the rights of those who are helpless and needy. This is a text that challenges the church to incorporate public advocacy into its ministry with uprooted people. Often these vulnerable persons are not given the opportunity to defend themselves or are unable to do so because of language barriers, legal complexities, or personal trauma. While not all immigrants are economically poor, all of them need advocates to ensure that the justice that God intends will be done.

There is much to confess as we open ourselves to the future God is bringing into being in our very midst. And there is much for which to yearn and hope as we respond to the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the church and the world.

- **We confess our fears and insecurities that block us from seeking to enter into relationship with new neighbors. Our fears constitute a spiritual weakness. Our lack of faith makes us resistant to the transformation Christ seeks for his church. We are so anxious that we might lose what we have that we do not reach out to newcomers with the same venturesomeness they have manifested in journeying to this land.**

Let us challenge ourselves to trust in God's power by entering into relationship with newcomers. We need to face our fears and insecurities honestly as pastoral issues of central significance. We need to develop the resources that will enable us through mutual support to venture in faith to enter new friendships with the confidence that God will continue to open the way for future steps.

- **We confess that we have kept newcomers at a distance and not responded to them as neighbors in the way Jesus taught (Luke 10). In this familiar parable, the injured traveler on the road to Jericho was the "encountered one" whom the Samaritan assisted. The Samaritan exemplified love of neighbor. Perhaps the cultural differences that newcomers often exhibit (racial, ethnic, linguistic, customs) is a major reason for the fears that prevent us from seeking to know them. And because we do not know them, we often are blind to ways they are deprived of human rights and suffer as a result of government policies. Yet, in Christ, the stranger becomes the neighbor. While estrangement keeps us apart, Christ moves us to encounter "the stranger" as neighbor in a spirit of love and friendship.**

Let us challenge ourselves to trust in the promises of God that God's Kingdom will be on earth as it is in Heaven. The vision of God's Kingdom calls us to participate in God's work by breaking down barriers, healing divisions, guarding each person's dignity, advocating for the voiceless, and extending the Gospel of reconciling love to all. It is a wonderful opportunity for many of our predominantly Anglo churches in the United States to change our face, indeed our whole body, into a multicolored face and body, in this way anticipating the future God has in store. Whereas fears may incline us to self-protectiveness, faith in the promise of God in Christ can launch our churches into adventurous encounters with new neighbors that will transform churches and energize us all for more expanded ministry.

- **We confess our Presbyterian churches have not done intensive and focused Bible study and theological reflection on our relation with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The General Assembly has adopted significant policies to guide its social witness on policy questions and to empower ministries with these neighbors. We reaffirm these previous actions. Presbyterians are at work in many parts of the United States serving uprooted people. We celebrate their ministries. Yet apart from the 1980 study and policy on Mexican migration ("Strangers Become Neighbors"), there has been little biblical and theological work on the challenges that new neighbors bring to faithful discipleship. And many of our churches have not considered what these challenges mean for their witness to Jesus Christ in their own communities.**

Let us challenge ourselves to develop biblical and theological resources at the General Assembly level and in our local congregations for discerning God's calling with new neighbors. We need to find ways to help each other develop the patterns of study and encounter what moves us from isolation to engagement. We need to invite newcomers into the study and reflection processes to learn from them their reading of God's Word. One person has suggested we need "to lead with our ears," listening for ways God is addressing us in the personal presence of uprooted people.

- **We confess we have often failed to receive hospitably those persons who come from countries where the Presbyterian church has been actively engaged in mission. Why do we find it energizing and inspirational to send missionaries abroad to countries like Ghana, Sudan, and Guatemala, but then are reluctant to receive these persons in our churches and communities when they come to our country? Too often our churches have built walls between newcomers and ourselves rather than to receive them as gifts.**

Let us challenge ourselves to learn about the relation of Presbyterian mission work to current immigrant and refugee populations. To be sure, churches are called to extend ministries of hospitality and public advocacy to all. But the mission connection provides a way for churches to discern the relation of our mission abroad and at home. Jesus challenges us to move out from our own particular national and cultural grouping to encounter the stranger, to receive the stranger as a gift, to advocate for the stranger's well-being, to help provide for the stranger's well-being with our resources as individuals, congregations, and governing bodies, and to open ourselves anew to the power of the Holy Spirit to form a new community in Christ.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) recommends that the 211th General Assembly (1999) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approve the Resolution on "Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounter with New Neighbors" as the basis for the call to a new level of engagement with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, at all levels of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and to this end to approve the following actions:

a. Reaffirm the guiding theological and ethical principles contained in the historical review of Presbyterian policy on immigration and refugee issues, and commit to rediscover its identity as a church of the stranger:

(1) Christians are obligated by the loving will of God to seek to ensure that the basic needs of persons for food, clothes, shelter, and safety are met (Matt. 25: 35–40).

(2) Christians believe in the intrinsic worth of each human as a person made in the image of God.

(3) The Christian confession of Jesus Christ as Lord transforms "strangers" into neighbors who are welcomed into our communities.

(4) Churches are called to ministry with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants, and to public witness on their behalf.

(5) Christians have the responsibility to challenge and to shape government policy regarding refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.

(6) Love of neighbor requires Christians to seek justice for refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.

(7) Faithfulness to Christ means Christians always live in tension with national values and policies.

(8) Christians may affirm certain values in national and international life as consistent with their theological vision of human community.

b. Reaffirm the guiding policy principles contained in the historical review of Presbyterian policy on immigration and refugee issues and to utilize them to rediscover its identity as a church of the stranger:

(1) Christians should engage in pastoral, compassionate, educational, and prophetic ministries with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.

(2) The provision of sanctuary for asylum seekers may be an appropriate moral response for churches even though the United States government regards this witness as illegal.

(3) Churches should vigorously advocate the church's right to religious freedom in their ministries with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.

(4) Refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants should be treated humanely and justly in government policies and in our communities.

(5) The United States should respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and adhere to international laws and accords that seek to implement standards of universal human rights.

(6) Christians should seek the elimination of discrimination and racism from government policies and community responses.

(7) The United States government should ensure that the constitutional rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants to due process of law are protected.

(8) Sovereign nations should exercise their authority to regulate immigration with a presumption toward generosity rather than restrictiveness.

(9) The United States should open jobs to neighbors with a strong and continuing historical connection who need and want to work so long as there are jobs available and the poor already residing in the United States are not further disadvantaged.

(10) Restrictions on immigration should be enforced humanely.

(11) The United States government should make the causes of human displacement a major priority in United States foreign policy.

c. Direct the General Assembly Council, through its Ministries Divisions, to coordinate the various initiatives for ministry with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers by:

(1) Urging sessions and presbyteries to develop new approaches to ministry with new neighbors and to share those models that are successful in order to be mentors and models for others; and encouraging presbyteries and synods as the locus of support to congregations and individuals called into caring ministry with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

(2) Identifying (bibliography) and/or developing resources (Bible study materials, historic reflections, faith stories, theological reflections, etc.) to assist Presbyterians as they recognize the gifts of multicultural encounters and to wrestle with the challenges, and to give voice to reflections from immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

(3) Encouraging Presbyterians to express pastoral concerns and prayers for those whose service in the Immigration and Naturalization Service, acknowledging that they often find themselves faced with difficult, morally ambiguous, and even morally indefensible situations in the enforcement of U.S. immigration policy.]

(4) Identifying and/or developing resources for pastoral care with asylum seekers and immigrants who are in detention.

(5) Making available on the PC(USA) Web site appropriate linkages and information on reliable immigration services.

(6) Informing Presbyterians about policy and program concerns related to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, particularly in the United States, but also globally.

(7) Identifying a time in the *Presbyterian Planning Calendar* to lift up before the church the needs, gifts, and vision for multiethnic ministry with immigrants (examples would include a special migration week, or Language Mission Sunday).

(8) Translating the document Resolution on "Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounter with New Neighbors" into Spanish and Korean.

(9) Producing a study guide to accompany the resolution, recommendations, and background paper for use in congregations that would include suggestions for a course of advocacy.

d. Reaffirm the 209th General Assembly (1997) Resolution on "Welfare and Poverty" policy on the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, urge presbyteries and congregations to respond to the plight of refugees and immigrants during the next year when public assistance ends, and to advocate publicly on their behalf so that their basic needs will be met.

e. Reaffirm the consistent witness of General Assemblies on behalf of due process in legal proceedings and urge Presbyterians, presbyteries, and congregations to engage in advocacy efforts to ensure that foreigners in the United States have the same legal protections that citizens enjoy, including the right to legal counsel.

f. Advocate for the repeal of those sections of the 1996 immigration law that provide for the expedited removal of asylum seekers and immigrants without a full hearing, including the right of appeals, urging presbyteries and sessions to do similar advocacy. Until these sections are repealed, the Immigration and Naturalization Service

(INS) of the United States government should cooperate with efforts to monitor independently the way "expedited removal" is applied.

g. Advocate for the repeal of those sections of the 1996 immigration law that removes review of that law and its administration from the jurisdiction of immigration judges and the federal courts, urging presbyteries and sessions to similar advocacy.

h. Oppose the routine use of detention as an enforcement tool in addressing common immigration violations, noting the particular hardship this puts on women and children, urging presbyteries and sessions to similar advocacy.

i. Advocate for use of the credible fear standard for releasing asylum seekers from detention, and assuring a more speedy adjudication to reduce unreasonably lengthy stays in detention, urging presbyteries and sessions to do similar advocacy. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) should ensure asylum seekers are not held in local jails, nor detained with local criminals, and that they are provided humane conditions including adequate and appropriate food, personal treatment, medical care, prompt access to legal help, family, and friends.

j. Urge that numerical limits used by the United States on allowing adjudicated asylum seekers adjust to a legal permanent residence (LPR) status be lifted, urging presbyteries and sessions to do similar advocacy.

k. Urge restoration of a more generous admission of refugees, giving particular attention to the annual report of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and ensuring that those refugees identified and screened as being in urgent need of resettlement (rescue) be a priority for United States admissions, urging presbyteries and sessions to do similar advocacy.

l. Advocate for the repeal of sections of the 1996 immigration law that require state and local governments, and publicly funded institutions and programs (such as hospitals, battered women's shelters, WIC, church feeding programs) to report undocumented persons to the INS, urging presbyteries and sessions to do similar advocacy. The 211th General Assembly (1999) further calls on Christians who are under such reporting requirements to weigh in their conscience the claims of this requirement against the biblical injunction to shelter and welcome the stranger.

m. Advocate for review of the sections of the 1996 immigration law that defined misdemeanors as felonies for purposes of deportation and removed the possibility of an immigration judge granting a discretionary waiver from deportation based on a person's whole case, urging presbyteries and sessions to do similar advocacy. The 211th General Assembly (1999) affirms that Christian belief demands that we make an allowance for atonement and redemption of those who have made a mistake but are working to overcome it.

n. Express concern and encourage study of the militarization of our nation's borders for the purpose of dealing with immigration.

o. Approve the report as a whole for churchwide study and use, and direct the Stated Clerk to publish the entire report "Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounter with New Neighbors" with study guide, distributing it to the middle governing bodies and their resource centers, appropriate networks related to ministry with or advocacy for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers, targeted sessions in areas with high immigrant populations, libraries of the theological seminaries, in consultation with the Worldwide Ministries Division.

[Financial Implications: $5,700 (1999), Per Capita Budget (OGA)]

RATIONALE

INTRODUCTION

This resolution responds to a referral (*Commissioners' Resolution 97-25. On Instructing the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy to Study the Plight of Undocumented and Documented Immigrants in the United States and U.S. Policy Towards Immigration [*Minutes, *1997, Part I, pp. 42, 46, 746]*) from the 209th General Assembly (1997) calling for recommendations about recent developments that impact refugees[1], asylum seekers[2], and immigrants[3] in the United States; and for "a comprehensive review of previous policy on these issues." The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) discovered the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be rich with members with great expertise on these issues. A resolution team was convened to develop a report for its consideration. Members of the resolution team included: E. Obiri Addo, Nancy Becker, Mauricio Chacon, John R. Long, Sharon Stanley, and Thomas D. Theriault. Additional readers offering valuable comments on the document included: Lois Baker, Susan Krehbiel, David A. Martin, Rojelio Nunez, Donald L. Smith, and Adam Voysey.

Staff to the team were: Peter Sulyok, coordinator for the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy; and, Susan Ryan, coordinator of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance of the Worldwide Ministries Division. Dana Wilbanks served as consultant and primary writer.

The team met in San Francisco from October 29–31, 1998, to develop the main themes, recommendations, and general outline for the resolution. A first draft was circulated to members of the group and a wider circle of readers with knowledge about immigration, refugee, and asylum issues. A second draft was prepared, responding to suggestions, and was brought to the meeting of ACSWP in Louisville, January 14–16, 1999.

The review of previous General Assembly policy was prepared by Dana Wilbanks in September, 1998, and was reviewed by the Theological Educators for Presbyterian Social Witness and the resolution team before it was brought in revised form to the meeting of ACSWP in January 1999.

The resolution acknowledges with gratitude the social witness of previous General Assemblies to the challenges and opportunities presented by immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The resolution also points to grave issues raised by the recent immigration law (1996) and other policies such as welfare reform in 1995. These changes point to the need for vigorous and persistent advocacy for these new neighbors in our midst who often find themselves highly vulnerable to mistreatment and deprivation.

The resolution also gives special attention to the challenge that new neighbors present to our congregations. Jesus Christ comes to us in the form of "the stranger," and it is through the encounter of churches with these strangers that we respond to the call of Jesus. And it is also through this encounter that churches are transformed into being signs of the Reign of God, the future that God intends and is even now making possible through the movement of the Holy Spirit. Social witness, evangelism, and congregational mission need to be more fully related for churches to respond faithfully to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

The recommendations address both of these areas. Social witness represents the church's public advocacy for generous, compassionate, hospitable, and just treatment. Specific recommendations address the features of the 1996 immigration law, which put asylum seekers at especially grave risk. It also addresses the harsh impact of the welfare reform act of 1995, which leaves some refugees and immigrants without basic necessities for life.

The recommendations also address actions that General Assembly agencies, presbyteries, and congregations are challenged to take to encounter new neighbors as gifts to the church. The recommendations call for materials, experiments, and special studies that are designed to equip churches for the transformative personal encounter with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The call is nothing short of creating a new ethnically inclusive church that is a sign and a foretaste of the Kingdom to come (Rev. 7:9–10).

A STORY

We begin with a reflection on the story of Mauricio Chacon, an undocumented immigrant from El Salvador who is now pastor of Mission Presbyterian Church in San Francisco, California. He is a gift that could easily have been unopened and sent summarily back to El Salvador. Mauricio Chacon was a law student, a political activist, and an atheist. When the repressive military government shut down the university and student leaders began to disappear, Mauricio fled in fear for his life, leaving his wife and daughter behind. Without the proper documents he drove to Tijuana and slipped across the border into California, hoping for a new and better life. Working menial jobs, several at a time, he saved enough to send for his family.

At the birth of their son, Mauricio secured legal residency and worked his way into a managerial job. When his daughter became involved in a Baptist church, she encouraged her daddy to come with her. He did, and for the first time heard the message of salvation. The family visited a small Spanish-speaking Reformed Church where Mauricio was overwhelmed by the love extended to him. In time, he committed his life to Christ. He read voraciously and began to teach and preach, and even led evangelist services in a local park.

Recognizing Mauricio's obvious gifts in pastoral ministry, a friend, a presbytery executive, urged him to attend a Presbyterian seminary. After graduation, he was called to Mission Presbyterian Church, a dying inner-city church in San Francisco. With unflappable faith, Mauricio organized numerous ministries to immigrants and refugees, to youth and seniors. He has become a highly visible and widely loved pastor in the community, and his church is growing in numbers and vitality. They recently completed a $1 million renovation of their 100-year-old facility, turning it into a stunningly beautiful center of worship, ministry, and outreach.

And to think, had Mauricio been apprehended after seeking refuge in our country, he would have been sent back into danger, and both our country and our church would have been deprived of the extraordinary gifts that God had hidden in a fearful young man, destined to be a fruitful Presbyterian pastor.

REFLECTIONS

God is opening up profound opportunities for churches to make friends with new neighbors in our communities. Diverse peoples continue to come to the United States from many other places in the world. For some it is a desperate journey from circumstances of terror and deprivation. For others it is a venture toward greater opportunity to realize their gifts and dreams. Each uprooted person has a story to tell that could teach others about faith, courage, and hope.

The General Assembly has long advocated national policies that ensure just and humane treatment of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. We need to continue to do this work with renewed imagination and vigor. The 1996 Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IRIRA) presents new challenges for public witness. This resolution seeks to address some of the severe problems presented by recent laws and policies. At the same time, this resolution seeks to challenge our churches to encounter these newcomers as persons who are loved by God and who are gifts to the church. There is much work we have yet to do as a denomination in responding to the presence of these newcomers in our communities. Our public advocacy for the well-being of newcomers needs to go hand-in-hand with our readiness to extend the church's ministry through prayer and friendship, evangelism and education, mission and congregation development, tangible assistance and readiness to learn and to be transformed.

The Gospel's call to encounter new neighbors is being heard and heeded in a number of places in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). It is being heard and heeded

- in a multiethnic and multilingual congregation in San Francisco that reaches out to immigrants and refugees and is served by an immigrant pastor from El Salvador;
- in an African American Presbyterian Church in New Jersey that is served by an immigrant pastor from Ghana; and
- in an interdenominational refugee ministry with Laotian and Cambodian refugees in Fresno, California, served by a Presbyterian pastor.

The call is also being heard and heeded in General Assembly work in a number of converging studies and initiatives, such as

- "Building Community Among Strangers" by the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, submitted to the 211th General Assembly (1999);
- "Facing Racism: A Vision of the Beloved Community" report by Racial Ethnic Violence Initiative Team, submitted to the 211th General Assembly (1999);
- "Racial Ethnic and Immigrant Evangelism and Church Growth Strategy Paper," approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998), with special attention to church growth with immigrant congregations and the establishment of an immigrant ministry position in the National Ministries Division;

- "Mission in the 1990s: A Strategic Direction in Worldwide Ministry for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," approved by the 205th General Assembly (1993); and
- "Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way," adopted by the 203rd General Assembly (1991).

These are just a few examples of an emerging recognition that Presbyterians and their churches are being called by God to reach out beyond their traditional, comfortable communities of class and race. This is surely one mark of faithful ministry in our time. And, it is a matter of urgency both for our churches and newcomers. If we fail to receive them as gifts, we are impoverished and unfaithful. For our churches, there is still the opportunity to break down the walls that prevent us from encountering these strangers as neighbors in Christ. There is still the opportunity to move with the Holy Spirit in a direction that will transform and vitalize our churches. There is still the opportunity to be faithful to the summons of the living God. But if we miss this opportunity now, it may be gone the next time we seek to respond.

For newcomers, too, it is urgent. For many asylum seekers, their very lives are at stake. For refugees and immigrants, their livelihood, their children's future, and their mental and spiritual well-being are at stake as they struggle under trying circumstances of isolation, insecurity, and deprivation to forge a new life here. They need friends, advocates, encouragement, and hope.

CURRENT PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES

The migration of vast numbers of people in the world continues to be a marked characteristic of this era of human history. This movement, in part, reflects an unceasing succession of tragedies, which endanger people's lives and uproot them from their homelands. This movement, in part, reflects the large-scale forces of a global economy that widens the gap between rich and poor, and requires the migration of labor from the south to the north. At the same time that there are powerful dynamics that force people to move, more affluent nations like the United States are becoming more restrictive in admitting newcomers. As we consider the mind-numbing figures reaching into the millions, it is imperative that Christians remember that we are considering the fate of individual persons, each loved by God and created in God's image.

In the 1990s a negative reaction to newcomers was building in the United States. Legislative energies were directed toward ways to restrict the entry of newcomers ever more tightly. The United States has almost cut in half the number of refugees it accepts, from around 150,000 in the 1980s to 79,000 per year in 1999 (out of over twenty million worldwide). California Proposition #187 was perhaps the most drastic expression of this sentiment. This proposition would cut off social services and public benefits for undocumented persons, including barring children from public schools. While other states did not follow suit and the legality of this proposition is still being contested, Congress in 1996 passed the Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IRIRA), in part, in response to this wider negative sentiment.

Now there is some evidence to suggest that the American public believes restrictionist attitudes have been too harsh and that positive values of newcomers need to be more widely recognized. It is timely for the General Assembly to propose changes to several of the most harsh features of the 1996 act. And it is a time of opportunity for churches to become more actively engaged in ministries of hospitality and advocacy.

Certain provisions of the 1996 Act (IRIRA) place asylum seekers especially at grave risk. While the intent of these provisions is, at best, to make judgments about asylum claims more expeditiously and to weed out those whose claims are spurious, the provisions of the act lead to the violation of the requirements of due process of law and to the inhumane treatment of persons whose claims may be genuine. In addition, certain steps toward improving the asylum system had already been taken in 1995, including giving work authorizations to asylum seekers six months after they have applied for asylum or the granting of asylum (whichever comes first), the increase in the numbers of asylum officers, and the development of a professional asylum corps), but these efforts were not given enough time to determine their effectiveness.

It is important to realize that the struggles of asylum seekers are often outside the range of public view. Most of us live day-by-day without any awareness of what is going on. This is a slice of reality, which is, for the most part, hidden. Yet the need of persons for asylum continues to be very real. The VIVE, an organization in Buffalo, New York, that assists world refugees, reports that in 1998 they have helped more than one thousand refugees from sixty-four different countries.

The 1996 act (IRIRA) provides for a quick way to remove certain types of foreigners who have not been officially admitted to the United States. This is officially termed "expedited removal." Persons trying to enter the U.S. without valid documents will be removed unless they can express their fear of persecution or desire to apply for asylum to the immigration officer at the airport. The immigration officer is authorized to make a determination about removal without any opportunity for review or appeal. If the person applies for asylum, he or she will be granted an interview and possibly a full hearing, and can request an administrative review of a negative decision. But until the time of the interview and hearing, the asylum seeker is automatically held in detention. For many, the choice is deportation or detention.

This act (IRIRA) strips federal courts of crucial opportunities to review the findings and rulings of immigration officers. In effect, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of the United States government is given breathtaking authority over people's lives without the accountability structures normally ensured by the court system. The INS is thus given authority over both admission of asylum seekers and enforcement of judgments that, without the opportunity for appeal, can readily be subject to arbitrary actions. This wide discretion regarding deportation given to the INS extends also to immigrants and refugees already in the United States. They may be quietly and quickly deported after being arrested for minor offense such as vehicular violations.

It is important that we look at the human side of these procedures regarding asylum seekers. Persons who seek asylum in the United States often must escape from their homeland without being able to gather the kinds of documents that can provide proof that they live under the threat of persecution. The officials from which they might need to obtain documents might well be the very ones who are participating in the persecution.

Now put yourself in the shoes of Ms. Joseph (a real person, though not her real name). Ms. Joseph was born and raised in Haiti. Family members and friends had been members of President Aristide's personal security force. When the coup ousted President Aristide in 1991, the Joseph family was targeted in a wave of repression and persecution. On two occasions, members of the Haitian military attacked the house where Ms. Joseph was staying, and she was gang raped both times.

In November 1992, Ms. Joseph was finally able to escape Haiti in a flimsy boat for a dangerous trip to the United States. When she arrived, the Church World Service (CWS) helped her seek asylum. Yet, initially she was denied asylum because she was unable to talk about her experience of rape, the most compelling reason for her escape. Attorneys for CWS helped her prepare an appeal, and eventually and reluctantly she was able to admit that she had been raped. After several additional legal challenges, Ms. Joseph finally was granted the asylum she so desperately needed.

This is just one of many stories that shows how difficult it often is for asylum seekers to communicate the reasons they have "a well-founded fear of persecution." The story also vividly illustrates why the opportunity for appeal is so crucial.

When we take into account these very human dynamics, it is all the more crucial to ensure that asylum seekers are treated humanely and fairly. The right to seek asylum is recognized in international law. Persons who seek asylum are often among the most vulnerable persons of all because they cannot go home, yet they must find some place where they can live and be safe. Asylum is a precious option. We would want no less for a close family member who is in danger in a particular country.

The gravity of decisions about asylum requires the full protection of the courts, including the right of asylum seekers to be represented by a lawyer. Every person has the right to have options clarified in a language they can understand. Previous General Assembly policy insists that due process of law be faithfully implemented. Even persons in the United States without documents should be granted the same legal right as citizens. There should be no double standard of justice differentiating between citizens' rights of due process and noncitizens' rights.

The other feature of the 1996 Immigration Act (IRIRA) that needs to be lifted up is the use of detention. Asylum seekers are routinely placed in detention while their appeals for asylum are being considered. Because of insufficient space in federal prisons, growing numbers of asylum seekers are being detained in county jails with persons charged with crimes. County jails, in fact, make money off this arrangement with the INS. Sometimes detainees are transferred from place to place, which further isolates them from family members and legal help. One can imagine the mental and emotional strain on the person who is detained. He or she may not be able to communicate in English, is without any kind of legal or pastoral assistance, and may not have the kind of food that is needed.

The picture here evokes a compassionate and angry response from Christians—compassionate toward the asylum seekers and angry at this inhumane treatment. Indiscriminate and routine use of detention may cause a retraumatization of an asylum seeker in the process of trying to ensure an orderly process. The General Assembly should advocate for them by insisting that

asylum seekers should not be routinely detained, and never detained with common criminals. Improper documents, understandable in light of the desperation many of these persons feel, are not in themselves sufficient grounds for detention.

The Resolution on "Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounter with New Neighbors" also points to the impact of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (welfare reform) on refugees and immigrants already living in our communities. Although recent outcries have prompted the restitution of some benefits, during this next year many will be cut off from public assistance. Especially in areas of the United States characterized by high unemployment, vulnerable persons will have great difficulty meeting their basic needs. The seven-year safety net established until a refugee or immigrant becomes a U.S. citizen may not be reasonable for vulnerable refugees in particular. Torture, disability, lengthy imprisonment, and other mitigating factors may mean that some refugees may never attain self-sufficiency or meet the standard of U.S. citizenship. Churches need to be alert to this development before they are suddenly faced with a severe crisis. Clearly, churches are called to social ministries that seek to respond directly to these needs. But responsibility goes beyond this to public advocacy as well. General Assemblies have been clear that meeting basic needs is a minimal requirement of justice for which the entire community bears responsibility.

It is crucial that responses of General Assemblies be informed by the policies adopted by previous assemblies on refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. The next section of this report provides the "comprehensive review of previous policy on these issues and an analysis of the sociopolitical context to which it speaks," which was requested by the 209th General Assembly (1997). What are the primary theological convictions and ethical principles that have shaped General Assembly policy?

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

We begin our review of Presbyterian policy in the post-World War II period (i.e., mid-1940s). We shall not distinguish between the actions of the PCUS and the UPCUSA General Assemblies, regarding them instead as constituting a single stream of General Assembly policy. This review does not attempt to analyze the complex international context that generates so many uprooted people, but focuses on the policies adopted by General Assemblies, which address primarily the churches and the United States government.

At no point did General Assemblies seek to adopt a comprehensive policy that would address the whole range of specific issues and questions. Presbyterian policy is historical and contextual, responding to concrete circumstances and challenges. Now, at the end of the twentieth century, the context is quite different from fifty years ago. The processes of globalization generate massive movements within continents and from the south to the north. Travel from place to place is much easier. The numbers of uprooted people continue to grow at an alarming rate, even after the end of the cold war. In 1951, there were one million uprooted people by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics. In 1970, the number of uprooted of concern to the UNHCR grew to 2.5 million, by 1980 it was 8.2 million, and by 1998 the uprooted numbered more than 22.7 million.

At the end of World War II, the suffering of massive numbers of uprooted people in Europe was immense. What to do in response to this human challenge was a daunting responsibility of the newly formed United Nations and the victorious allied nation states. Churches, also, were actively involved in creating ways to meet this humanitarian crisis. The international mechanisms for protecting and aiding refugees were put into place in this period. This construct is sometimes called the "international refugee regime," fashioned in response to the European refugee challenge, yet continued even into the present. In the past fifty years, the U.S. has received most of its refugees from Communist countries; consistently granting them privileged status in comparison with refugees from other countries.

From the mid-1940s to the present, General Assemblies have encouraged the U.S. government to be more generous in admitting refugees and in providing relief for the many refugees in the world. Assemblies called on the U.S. government to seek solutions to the world refugee problem. Until the mid-1960s, the government and churches had a basically cooperative relation. The U.S. government was not yet seen as at times sharing major complicity in the creation of refugees.

The next historical period, when assemblies responded to a tragic refugee crisis, was the Indochina War (mid 1960s to 1975, and then into the 1980s in terms of the situation of refugees). With this major event came a shift in church/government relations. The assemblies became increasingly critical of United States policy in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, pointing to the massive suffering by the Indochinese peoples. Many of them were uprooted from their homes as a consequence of the escalation of the war. Assemblies still attempted to work cooperatively with the U.S. government in order to render assistance to Indochinese refugees, but church/government relations had moved to a period of increasing tension and sometimes outright conflict.

The time when this tension became most evident in Presbyterian witness on refugee policy was during the 1980s. The U.S. experienced for the first time the sudden arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers from the Caribbean region. In previous years, the U.S. had welcomed all Cubans as refugees escaping from the Communist regime of Fidel Castro. But now Castro reputedly was emptying his jails, sending various sorts of Cubans to the U.S., including common criminals, in addition to people who were opposed to the political and economic system. The U.S. had to scramble to find ways to accommodate the large and unexpected flood of newcomers.

Asylum seekers were also arriving in large numbers from Haiti. This was even more problematic because the U.S. government was less ready to grant asylum to Haitians than to Cubans. The Haitian people were subjected to a vicious political regime and a desperate economic situation in Haiti. The General Assemblies were especially critical of U.S. government practices that included inequality of treatment, long delays in determining the status of Haitian refugees, enforced detention in prison-like camps, imposition of high seas interdiction, continuing threats of reducing or eliminating federal assistance, and the exclusion of other Haitians and returning them to uncertain fates in Haiti (1982).

The crisis of Cuban and Haitian asylum seekers intensified again in the 1990s when many persons tried to maneuver flimsy boats in the treacherous water toward Florida. Assemblies frequently deplored the conditions in which Cubans and Haitians were detained and vigorously protested the refusals by the U.S. government to consider the claims by Haitians for asylum. Assemblies also deplored the practice of interdicting asylum seekers on the high seas and returning them involuntarily to their home countries. A practice referred to as refoulement and prohibited in international conventions signed by the United States.

The primary challenge for Presbyterians in the post-World War II period was its witness in response to refugees and asylum seekers from Central America. In 1980, the U.S. government had adopted a morally exemplary refugee act that affirmed the definition of refugee in international law. Many presumed this law would provide the basis for a more evenhanded response to refugee claims and change government cold war policy of receiving only those who were escaping from Communist countries. Soon these hopes were dashed. Early in the 1980s, the United States government was supporting governments in Guatemala and El Salvador, which were adopting repressive measures against many of their peoples, even as those countries endured harsh economic consequences of ongoing war and political instability. Increasingly Central Americans fleeing from the violence in their countries pushed through Mexico to the U.S. border to try to gain asylum in the United States.

The U.S. government treated most of them as economic migrants, not as refugees, and frequently deported them back to dangerous conditions in their home countries without a chance to present their case for asylum. Some religious workers along the border, especially Arizona and Texas, were spiritually convicted by the suffering of these refugees and the very real possibility that they would be killed if they were sent back home. The religious workers first sought various legal remedies to protect them in the United States. But when these efforts failed, they initiated the “sanctuary movement” to protect asylum seekers, to dramatize the religious and moral case for protection, and to challenge the U.S. government to uphold the provisions of the 1980 law and international standards to which the U.S. had formally subscribed.

In 1982, the General Assembly urged that asylum seekers from El Salvador and Guatemala be granted extended voluntary departure (EVD) so they could remain in the U.S. until conditions were safe in their home countries. The assembly also urged congregations to become sanctuaries for asylum seekers. This witness continued in the next several years as assemblies repeated their challenge to churches to support asylum seekers and those who were providing sanctuary for them.

The conflict between church and government further intensified in the mid-1980s when a Presbyterian minister was numbered among others in Texas and Arizona arrested for aiding asylum seekers. The 197th General Assembly (1985) not only expressed its continuing support for sanctuary workers, it also vehemently expressed its “outrage about the use of undercover federal agents in church services and Bible study groups to gather evidence,” a practice employed to entrap church sanctuary workers for prosecution. In 1986, the Presbyterian church joined with other parties to file a suit against agencies and agents of the U.S. government for violating the constitutional right of the defendants to the free exercise of religion. In 1990, a district court judge in Phoenix agreed with the denomination’s claim that “the government in conducting criminal investigation does not have ‘unfettered discretion’ to infiltrate religious services” (*Presbyterian Church et.al. v. The United States of America et.al.* [referenced in Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*. University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p. 217]).

By the late 1980s, the violence in Central America had diminished and fewer of their peoples were seeking to escape to the United States. The sanctuary workers in Arizona had been convicted and were placed on probation. However, the strength of Presbyterian witness on behalf of asylum seekers and those who sought to assist them should not be forgotten as the immediacy of those years dims. The assemblies made clear that Presbyterians were called to protect and minister to asylum seekers whose

lives were seriously threatened, even if that meant the transgression of certain policies and practices of the federal government. Sanctuary workers consistently maintained that they were not disobeying the law; rather, they argued it was the U.S. government that was violating the terms of the 1980 Refugee Act and obligations under international law. This interpretation was important to assemblies who also believed they were upholding national and international human rights standards in opposing government practices. The Presbyterian witness during these years represents one of the sharpest conflicts between Presbyterian assemblies and the United States' government in the history of the Presbyterian church in the U.S.A.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: IMMIGRANTS

In the post-World War II period, immigration did not become a "hot" topic in public debate until the late 1970s. By then, growing concerns about the migration of undocumented Mexicans generated new studies, new debates, and new policy initiatives. Prior to this development, however, the Presbyterian assemblies were not silent. They spoke out especially against the racial preferences in favor of Anglo Europeans in the existing national immigration policy. They also consistently acted in support of humane and compassionate treatment of immigrants, and for increasing the limit of those who could legally enter the U.S. (see 1948, 1953, 1954, 1963).

The national origins system of immigrant admission, adopted in 1924 during a time of nativist reaction against foreigners, continued to govern U. S. policy until 1965. Now the U.S. adopted a more explicitly cosmopolitan and nondiscriminatory approach to admission, in fact containing some of the changes Presbyterian assemblies had been advocating. The new policy (1965) set numerical limits for each hemisphere and also the same numerical limit for each country in the Eastern Hemisphere. Northern and Western European countries were no longer privileged as sources for immigrants. One consequence of this change was a substantial increase in the number of immigrants from Asia and Latin America.

During the 1970s, there was a growing concern about the migration of undocumented workers from Mexico into the U.S. Some people expressed the worry that the U.S. was losing control of its borders and was being swamped with large numbers of non-English speaking newcomers. Others were moved by the courage that many Mexican migrants exhibited in taking enormous risks to find work in the U.S. They were also chilled by stories of how these migrants would be subject to exploitation and abuse both by employers in the U.S. and "coyotes" whom the Mexicans depended on to get them across the border.

A presidential commission was formed to consider possible reforms, and congressional deliberations heated up. In the late 1970s, a task force of the two Presbyterian assemblies was formed to study the issues of Mexican migration and recommend policies to the Presbyterian bodies. The policy and recommendations were approved by both assemblies in 1981. This is the most comprehensive presentation of Presbyterian theological and ethical thought about immigration issues within the 1945–1998 period. Yet it remains focused on Mexican migration and does not attempt to deal with the whole scope of U.S. immigration policy, reflecting the political climate and concerns at the time.

The recommendations addressed both Presbyterian churches and the U.S. government. Churches were challenged to study the issues, provide pastoral and social assistance to Mexican migrants, work ecumenically both inside the U.S. and with partners in Mexico, and engage in prophetic ministry in order to ensure that basic needs would be met.

In brief, the assemblies advocated a national policy that would include amnesty, expanded opportunities for Mexicans to work in the U.S., employer sanctions, enforcement of labor laws, proof of the right to employment (noncounterfeitable and nontransferable right-to-work documents), and protection of the rights of Mexican migrants to civil rights and social services.

The General Assembly action on the Mexican Migration report was accomplished with the kind of timeliness that is highly desirable but difficult to achieve. Studies, committee deliberations, and policy debates were occurring at the national level, but Congress had not yet acted. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was adopted in 1986 as a culmination of years of struggle to deal especially with the challenges of undocumented immigrants from Mexico. It included certain features the General Assembly had advocated (e.g., amnesty and employer sanctions), but it did not include other elements (e.g., expansion of permanent quotas, proof of the right to employment). We shall see below that the General Assembly itself later changed its policy on several of these specific recommendations.

During the remaining years of the 1980s, the General Assembly continued to call for Presbyterians to respond to the human need of immigrants, and to call on U.S. officials to adhere to requirements of due process of law for undocumented persons as well as documented immigrants. In 1985, the assembly reminded Presbyterians that they are bound to the moral mandate of God's healing and reconciling love, which embraces the plight, oppression, suffering, torture, and loss of life of immigrants and undocumented persons among us, and that Presbyterians should advocate for social and economic rights for immigrants as acts of love and justice.

In the late 1980s, another task force was convened, this time to examine the consequences of IRCA. The report and recommendations were brought to the 202nd General Assembly (1990). The report was especially critical of the employer sanctions provision that made it illegal for employers to hire persons they knew were undocumented workers. At best, this was intended to prevent exploitation of undocumented persons and to provide a reasonable way to enforce limits on immigration. But in practice, the report pointed to the way this provision had been used to discriminate against Hispanics in the United States who are citizens or legal residents**,** and its one-sidedness as an enforcement tool. Employer sanctions were also deemed an ineffective remedy in controlling immigration and preventing exploitation for its one-sided focus on "pull" factors and failure to address factors "pushing" immigrants from their homelands.

For these reasons the General Assembly stated its opposition to employer sanctions and urged Presbyterians to work to get this provision repealed. The assembly also reversed its position on a right-to-work document, rejecting this means for controlling immigration because, like employer sanctions, it would likely lead to discriminatory applications. In addition, this assembly supported a more generous application of the amnesty component of IRCA in order to ensure family unity for Mexicans working in the U.S.

As the United States entered the 1990s, the topic of immigration moved from the periphery to the center of public controversy. Proposition #187 in the state of California seemed to signal a national mood of restrictiveness toward newcomers with a readiness to adopt harsh measures if necessary. This measure sought to cut off social services and public benefits for undocumented persons, including public education for their children. Although other states have not enacted similar legislation, recent national laws also reflect stronger anti-immigrant feeling than the U.S. has experienced in a long time. In the face of these trends, the 206th General Assembly (1994) called on Presbyterians "to discourage meanspirited rhetoric that pictures immigrants as less than fully human." Citing a statement from the 203rd General Assembly (1991), it also reminded Presbyterians that Christians are to reach out in love to newcomers in the spirit of Christ's vision of the kingdom: an open house, a festive table, a royal banquet made ready for all who will come.

THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL BASIS FOR POLICY

As Presbyterian General Assemblies responded to these varied historical challenges, which theological and ethical themes were most influential in providing guidance? In some cases, as the refugee crisis in the late 1940s, assemblies apparently did not believe a detailed theological rationale was necessary to call church and nation to a compassionate response. It was almost self-evident that Christians should respond to those persons who were uprooted from homelands by the violence of war and in desperate need for sustenance and security. It was sufficient to affirm that it is the will of God that the hungry be fed, the naked clothed, and the homeless sheltered (1947).

As immigration and refugee issues became controversial in the 1980s, the theological and ethical basis for assembly policy became developed more fully. Even so, we can find consistent convictions that inform Presbyterian policy during the past fifty years. We shall now identify recurring themes that have been influential in guiding assembly policy on refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.

1. *Christians are obligated by the loving will of God to seek to ensure that the basic needs of persons for food, clothes, shelter, and safety are met (Matt. 25: 35–40).*

This means that Christians will be advocates for the most vulnerable persons in their communities, nation, and world. Such responsibility is not qualified by conditions. God's will is understood as unconditional love for all. The primary issues is not nationality, nor is the primary issue whether the person is deserving of assistance or fits in a particular category. Responding generously to the basic needs of vulnerable persons is a faithful response to the loving will of God as it is disclosed in Jesus Christ.

This theological affirmation disposes Presbyterians to consider first the needs of refugees and immigrants. Clearly, this does not mean a disregard of the importance of laws, or the constraints of national and international policies, or the ambiguities of working in organizations and institutions in dealing with the complexity of massive human need. But the disposition is crucial. It is this kind of disposition that led Christians and churches to protect Central American asylum seekers. It is this kind of disposition that has led assemblies to advocate for asylum seekers from Haiti and undocumented immigrants from Mexico.

2. *Christians believe in the intrinsic worth of each human as a person made in the image of God.*

This theme is a further elaboration of the first one. Yet this conviction is important to emphasize because it has served as the theological basis for assembly criticism of national immigration policies that discriminate against persons on the grounds of

race, ethnicity, national origin, or illiteracy in old age (1953). The assembly in 1948 advocated that refugees should be admitted regardless of their nationality. Later assemblies maintained that asylum seekers should be treated equally, and that national policies and their enforcement should be racially nondiscriminatory. The equal worth of each person is a Christian belief of direct pertinence for immigration and refugee issues.

This theme further informed Presbyterian policy in its advocacy for the faithful implementation of the 1980 Refugee Act. This act reaffirmed the definition of refugee in international law. That is, a refugee is a person with a well-founded fear of persecution. Seemingly, the United States government would now be required to examine refugee claims more impartially rather than continuing almost exclusively to admit persons who were escaping from Communist regimes. The call to treat claims impartially and to receive asylum seekers from Central America who were in danger, even though their governments were on relatively friendly terms with the U.S. government, was clear and consistent, as was the call to consider the claims of Haitian asylum seekers who were seeking protection in the United States.

Moreover, the 1984 assembly appealed to the Gospel's call to recognize the inherent worth of all persons as the theological basis for opposing policies and practices of the U.S. government that result in wholesale murder of innocent persons, repression of basic human rights of individuals and ethnic groups, and a mounting tide of human suffering in Central America. That persons should be treated in a nondiscriminatory and nonideological way in determining eligibility of admission to the United States is, for Presbyterians, deeply rooted in theological convictions about the value of personhood.

3. *The Christian confession of Jesus Christ as Lord transforms "strangers" into neighbors who are welcomed into our communities.*

In Christ, barriers no longer divide and alienate; reconciliation is the new reality. All persons in all cultures are our neighbors. Jesus identified with the stranger in his own context and clearly emphasized hospitality as one sign of the reign of God (Matt. 25: 35–40; Luke 10:29–37). So it is that Christians are called to seek community with the "foreigners" in our midst, not governed by common stigmas, fears, and stereotypes that tend to prevail in our societies.

The image of "stranger" is an especially powerful theological motif in General Assembly policy on refugees and immigrants. This is an acknowledgment of the prominence of hospitality to strangers as a concrete expression of neighbor love in the life and teachings of Jesus. It is also an acknowledgment of the ways the "differences" represented by refugees and immigrants become the basis for exclusion, disregard, and discrimination. "Differences" may be national, ethnic, racial, linguistic, or religious, or any combination thereof. These frequently generate feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and even hostility by current residents of communities. But for Christians, the "otherness" of refugees and immigrants is not regarded negatively. Rather Jesus Christ invites us to enter into relation with persons in their "otherness" as a response to the expansive community of love and reconciliation that God is bringing into being.

Assemblies have reminded Presbyterians of the churches' responsibility to be agents of reconciliation and healing (1966). The 1994 assembly cites a resolution from 1991 on "Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Christ's Way," which speaks of Christian responsibility to reach out in love to newcomers, in the spirit of Christ's vision of the kingdom: an open house, a festive table, a royal banquet for all who will come. These theological themes and images call Presbyterians to welcome immigrants as "Christ's to us," as gifts to receiving communities, opening up possibilities of relationship that respond to God's purposes for humankind (1981). It is in the General Assembly policy on Mexican migration that the theological significance of the stranger and of borders find their fullest expression. It is clear here that Presbyterians are to view Mexican immigrants (and by implication other immigrants and refugees) not only as persons in need who require assistance, but neighbors in Christ with whom to enter relationship and to create community.

4. *Churches are called to ministry with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants, and to public witness on their behalf.*

General Assemblies take a high and challenging view of the moral responsibilities of churches. Consistently, assemblies have addressed both Presbyterian churches (members, congregations, governing bodies) and those charged with making and enforcing laws and policies (president, Congress, government officials, and agencies). With regard to refugees and asylum seekers, Presbyterians are called to render assistance through personal and congregational support. As early as 1950 the General Assembly encouraged Presbyterians to sponsor displaced persons. Presbyterians have also stressed the importance of supporting ecumenical efforts such as Church World Service to deliver humanitarian aid to refugees in the U.S. and all over the world. In specific circumstances, support can mean legal assistance, food, housing, medical care, provision of sanctuary, and bail bond funds.

General Assemblies call on the U.S. government to address both the root causes of refugee tragedies and to ensure that adequate humanitarian aid reaches refugees in timely and effective ways. Assemblies contend the United States should use its influence to correct abuses in the countries that generate refugees and asylum seekers. Moreover, the United States government should provide resources to state and local agencies for at-home responses.

Similarly, assemblies (specifically 1981 and 1990) call on Presbyterian governing bodies and congregations to provide education for members and to engage in pastoral, compassionate, and prophetic ministries with immigrants. Presbyterians are challenged to pray for and with immigrants, to seek community with them, and to learn from them. The responsibility to meet the concrete needs of immigrants includes housing, food, education, health services, legal assistance, and enhancing life opportunities. Presbyterians are also challenged to support ecumenical efforts in the United States and internationally, and to support immigrant congregations in the United States. Prophetic ministry clearly points to the responsibility of churches to be public advocates for immigrants in our communities and nation.

5. *Christians have the responsibility to challenge and to shape government policy regarding refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.*

Central to Reformed theology is the conviction that God calls Christians into engagement with the social structures of the world to seek the realizations of God's purposes. Governments are within the realm of God's creating, sustaining, and reconciling activity. It is, therefore, not surprising that a great deal of Presbyterian immigration and refugee witness is concerned with government policy.

An early assembly was explicit in its theological perspective on the responsibility of government. Presbyterians should seek God's purposes in national life. No policy of government is either right or wise that denies help to the homeless and hungry (1947). The assembly proceeds to assert that the abundant resources of the United States should be regarded as trusts from God to serve the needy and oppressed of the world. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Ps. 24:1)(1994). These convictions lead General Assemblies to critique and challenge government policies that are viewed as contrary to God's purposes, and to call the U.S. government to adopt policies that are more consistent with God's will for persons and communities.

6. *Love of neighbor requires Christians to seek justice for refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.*

In 1981, the assembly repeated the prophetic message that injustice is an offense against God. Justice is not merely a political norm. It is a positive ethical imperative grounded theologically in God's covenantal relationship with all humankind and Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors. The requirement "to do justice" appears often in General Assembly policies on refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. Rarely is the meaning of justice spelled out comprehensively. Clearly it has a broad range of interrelated meanings.

The 1981 policy provides the most extended discussion of justice and how it is an expression of Christian love. For Old Testament prophets, God is understood as an advocate for the poor, defending the defenseless, and protecting the vulnerable. Justice requires partiality to the needs and claims of the poor and oppressed. Justice redresses the imbalances between the privileged and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. Such justice, however, is not for the benefit of the poor only. Justice rights relationships, thus contributing to the well-being of all persons and the health of the whole community. Justice sees that burdens, hardships, and benefits are distributed equitably and that the needs of all will be met. A biblical vision of justice includes such concrete practices as paying a fair wage, and using a balanced scale in business dealings (Micah 6:10–11), seeing that those on trial receive a fair hearing (Amos 5:12); and it means not oppressing the sojourner, the orphan, and the widow (Jer. 7:6).

Christians are called to seek justice through practical political efforts in the U.S. and in the relationships of the U.S. to other nations. Thus, Presbyterians should work for policies that ensure the basic needs of Mexican immigrants are met, their rights are protected, working conditions are safe and humane, and that seek to improve the life opportunities for the poor in Mexico as well as those in the United States. In General Assembly policy, there is also an emphasis on ensuring that claims for refugee or asylum status are carefully heard, that officials and courts adhere to the requirements of due process of law, and that basic rights to safety and livelihood are fully protected. The norm of justice is consistently invoked to generate public witness in support of the basic dignity and humanness of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants who are so often among the most vulnerable and least protected of God's children.

7. *Faithfulness to Christ means Christians always live in tension with national values and policies.*

While Presbyterians have affirmed the values of living in a democratic society with lively traditions of compassion and justice, they also recognize the tensions of serving God and serving Caesar. These tensions have been very evident in assembly policies on refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. In 1981, the assembly pointed to the dual citizenship of Christians. We are members of the realm of God and seek above all to be faithful to the will of God, as we understand it in Jesus Christ. At the same time, we are citizens of a nation-state, the United States, which makes certain claims on us and provides a vital context in which we seek to exercise responsibility for the wider community.

God's love knows no boundaries, yet nation-states draw boundaries very tightly to limit the entrance of "outsiders." Christ overcomes the walls of hostility, which divide peoples, yet nation-states divide people according to national membership and use fences, walls, and armed forces to keep peoples separated. Christians live with and within this tension. Christians are citizens of both realms, but the two are not on an equal plain. The 1981 assembly affirms that for Christians national boundaries can never be ultimate, and national claims are never absolute. Christians experience "the extended family of God" through its community with church members all over the world (1994). Christian faithfulness to God is always primary, and loyalty to national authorities and causes is always derivative and secondary. When there is unresolvable conflict between the two, Christians must remain loyal to Christ. The 1994 policy reminds Presbyterians to view immigrants from the perspective of a loving Creator rather than according to human standards. "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way" (2 Cor. 5:16).

In immigration policy, this theological perspective means that Christians willingly seek relationship with persons crossing the border, whether or not they have documents. Christians seek to ensure that their needs are met and their rights are protected. They are persons loved by God, and Christians are called to relate to them as neighbors. In refugee and asylum policy, the moral requirement to assist and protect endangered persons has greater priority than serving as agents of national restrictiveness. Indeed, on occasion Christians may be required to take actions that are contrary to the policies and practices of the U.S. government and that risk, and possibly entail, imprisonment. This applies not only to individuals, but also to churches that offered to provide sanctuary to asylum seekers from Central America.

The tension was greatest when the agents of the U.S. government invaded church property to engage in clandestine surveillance in order to gather evidence against persons who were carrying out ministries with asylum seekers. Moreover, the judge in the subsequent trial ruled out testimony that would speak to the religious convictions of the sanctuary workers. Assemblies vigorously condemned government tactics, while defending the integrity and freedom of churches' worship and meetings. In the assemblies' judgment, the separation of church and state had been egregiously violated. Moreover, the assemblies continued to advocate for the right of sanctuary defendants to speak in court about the relevance of their religious convictions for their actions in protecting asylum seekers.

While the tensions and conflicts between the Presbyterian General Assemblies and government actions and policies have been serious, the assemblies do not repudiate the legitimate claims and purposes of nation states. Governments are implored to seek justice for immigrants and refugees, while recognizing that sovereign nations have a legitimate need to regulate immigration (1990). In 1963, the assembly advocated admission of immigrants that considers both the needs of people seeking admission and the vital interests of our own people, in terms of national security and economic well-being. Assemblies have also expressed special concern about the impact of immigration on the poor who are residing in the United States. In other words, Presbyterians do not advocate a radically separatist stance with regard to the nation-state, but they readily speak to the pertinence of their theological convictions for a more just and humane national community.

8. *Christians may affirm certain values in national and international life as consistent with their theological vision of human community.*

It is interesting to see how assemblies have appealed not only to specific theological beliefs, but also to particular understandings of the United States. The image of the Statue of Liberty provides an interpretation of the ethical promise of America, a land of liberty that welcomes those yearning to be free (1953). Assemblies have also supported the democratic faith that is articulated in the Declaration of Independence. The "best" of American tradition is supported and used as a basis for criticizing other features of national policy. For example, the democratic creed serves as a basis for challenging discrimination against persons because of national origin, race, color, or creed. This "best" tradition includes an early (1947) appeal to the "American tradition of sanctuary." It also includes the ideal that the U.S. will be a haven for the persecuted of other lands (1982). The constitutional right to due process of law has frequently been cited in calling government officials to treat refugees and immigrants justly.

General Assemblies have also given strong support for international norms of human rights, including economic as well as political rights. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been affirmed as containing moral obligations for governments that are consistent with the church's convictions about the worth of all persons. The United States is challenged to act in accord with international law governing refugees and immigrants. Specifically, this means readiness to consider carefully and impartially the claims of persons seeking refuge in the United States, to cease the practice of interdicting asylum seekers to keep them from entering the United States, and to treat refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants humanely, ensuring that their rights are respected while they are in the territory of the United States. These standards are also pertinent for U.S. policies in the international arena to address the root causes of refugee crises and large-scale migrations, and to contribute to more effective international responses to the heart-rending circumstances of refugees. United States' responses have a crucial impact on the policies and practices of the international community.

POLICY PRINCIPLES

In the previous section, we identified important theological and ethical convictions that have provided the basis for General Assembly policy on immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Now we shall highlight the primary principles that General Assemblies have employed in relating the faith of Presbyterians to challenges of a particular time. These are rooted in the above theological and ethical themes, and they provide guidance for assemblies as they decide the course of their witness.

1. *Christians should engage in pastoral, compassionate, educational, and prophetic ministries with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.*

Assemblies speak both to churches and to representatives of government. Many issues related to refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants necessarily involve laws and public policies. But there is much that the churches can and should do in addition to their prophetic ministry in the world. Assemblies have called for churches to include these persons in the orbit of their ministries and have empowered the connectional system to provide assistance and resources for this work. Concretely, churches are challenged to engage in the following efforts:

- Pray for and with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.
- Seek community with them, with an appreciation for their gifts and with an expectation of what we can learn from them.
- Meet the human needs of persons in areas such as housing and food, education for children and adults, health services, legal assistance, life opportunities.
- Educate members about issues, with the assistance of presbyteries, synods, and General Assembly entities.
- Advocate General Assembly actions in churches and the public arena.
- Work ecumenically within the U.S. and across borders, e.g., with Church World Service, Roman Catholic church, and evangelical partners in Mexico.

2. *The provision of sanctuary for asylum seekers may be an appropriate moral response for churches even though the U.S. government regards this witness as illegal* (1984).

General Assemblies were unwavering in their support of individual Christians and church communities who sought to protect asylum seekers from Central America. The Christian imperative to protect the lives of persons is greater than the obligation to act in conformity with government policies and procedures. This principle is not held lightly because Presbyterians value the structures and authority of government. Yet Presbyterians also recognize that governments may act in destructive and unjust ways, and therefore do not have absolute authority over Christian conscience. When the government does not protect the lives of asylum seekers, as it is required to do in international law, churches may find their faith leads them into collision with the government's exercise of its authority. Assemblies provided concrete assistance to sanctuary workers and urged other congregations to offer sanctuary to asylum seekers (1982). Assemblies also acted in pastoral and legal support of sanctuary workers who were arrested for their ministry with asylum seekers. In summary, as follows:

- Support for those who provide sanctuary for asylum seekers.

- Churches should consider the witness of sanctuary when the U.S. government is not protecting the lives of asylum seekers nor granting them due process of law.

- Churches should provide pastoral, financial and legal support for those who are arrested for engaging in actions that protect the lives of asylum seekers.

3. *Churches should vigorously advocate their right to religious freedom in their ministries with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.*

This principle was severely tested in the sanctuary struggles of the 1980s. Although assemblies had been critical of government policies before this time, the right to religious freedom had not yet been contested. But when the U.S. government sent undercover agents into church services and Bible study groups to gather information about sanctuary activities, the assemblies vehemently protested this violation of religious freedom (1985, 1986). The 1986 assembly also expressed its grave concern about the ruling of the judge in the trial of sanctuary workers that the defendants were not permitted to speak about the religious convictions that motivated their actions. Assemblies were not contending Christians are above the law; rather they maintained that the integrity of Christian religious life should be protected from government intrusion and that religious motivations are integral to the ministries with asylum seekers that may bring persons into conflict with government policies. In summary, as follows:

- Oppose the use of undercover federal agents in church service and Bible study groups to gather evidence (1985).

- Oppose the invasion of church property by government agents to engage in clandestine surveillance of church meetings (1985).

- Support the right of religious persons to engage in humanitarian work with asylum seekers and to speak about their religious motivations if they are brought to trial for violating the law (1986).

4. *Refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants should be treated humanely and justly in government policies and in our communities.*

Many of the assembly policies advocate upholding the dignity and humanity of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. Assemblies recognize that these persons are often subject to danger, cruel treatment, exploitation, and indifference. Basic needs for life, protection from harm, food, and shelter should be assured. The Mexican migration policy insists that the dignity, humanity, and rights of immigrants should be safeguarded. In addition, persons should not have to endure inhumane conditions, such as exist in some detention centers for asylum seekers and in some work environments for immigrants.

Concerns for the personhood of these vulnerable persons is expressed also in support for the family unity priority in public policy. For example, assembly policies have supported the extension of amnesty to undocumented Mexicans who have lived and worked in the United States for an extended period of time, recognizing that this will promote family unity. Concern for the well-being of refugees has also led the assembly to oppose “placement policies” that require refugees to settle in a certain part of the United States and that often ignore the needs that refugees have for community with other persons from their native land. In summary, as follows:

- Advocate humane treatment of asylum seekers while their status is reviewed.

- Protest inhumane living conditions of detention centers for asylum seekers.

- Favor measures that provide for basic needs of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants (1990).

- Favor special consideration to needs of women, children, and other persons with special needs (1990).

- Favor upholding basic social and civil rights for undocumented as well as documented immigrants, such as humane working conditions and access to health care and education.

- Support legislation that establishes programs of education, health, housing, job training, orientation, public assistance for the benefit of new immigrants (1974).

- Favor ensuring protection of immigrants against exploitation, abuse, and violation of labor laws.

- Favor support for the reunification of families, including adult sons and daughters of immigrants (1963, 1982).
- Favor amnesty for undocumented Mexican workers who have lived and worked in the U.S. for a significant length of time.

- Favor policy that requires the U.S. government to return federal resources to states and communities that are heavily impacted by immigration.

- Favor provision of adequate resources to communities in order to reduce the possibilities of conflict between immigrant groups and racial ethnic citizens (1990).

5. *The United States should respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and adhere to international laws and accords that seek to implement standards of universal human rights.*

This principle applies particularly to responses to refugees and asylum seekers because certain rights are enunciated clearly. Persons have the right to seek asylum in a safe country. They should not be prevented from presenting their claim (for example, interdiction on the high seas). They have the right not to be returned involuntarily to the country from which they have fled (non-refoulement). Refugees are defined in international law, which is incorporated in U.S. law through the Refugee Act (1980). They have a right to have their claims carefully and fairly considered.

Human rights standards also apply to immigrants. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights enunciates the right to work, the free choice of employment and protection against unemployment. The 1981 assembly advocated protecting the basic human and social rights of Mexican migrants. Included here are humane working conditions, access to health care and education, and constitutional guarantees of due process for undocumented as well as documented Mexican immigrants.

In summary, for refugees and asylum seekers:

- Ensure careful and impartial consideration of the claims of refugees and asylum seekers.

- Oppose deportation of asylum seekers without a fair hearing.

- Oppose interdiction (e.g., Haitians and Cubans) on the high seas.

In summary, for immigrants:

- Support the right to work, to the free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment (1990).

- Support protection of basic human and social rights of Mexican migrants, e.g., working conditions, access to health care and education and constitutional guarantees, and due process for undocumented as well as documented workers (1981).

6. *Christians should seek the elimination of discrimination and racism from government policies and community responses.*

This principle has been central from 1948 to the present. Early it addressed U.S. immigration policy, which discriminated against non-European people. On the basis of nondiscrimination, Presbyterians have opposed measures that would make some persons into second-class citizens (e.g., treatment of naturalized citizens). General Assemblies have vigorously opposed any expression of racism and racial discrimination. This led assemblies to speak out against the discriminatory treatment of Haitian asylum seekers. It was because of convincing evidence of discrimination and its one-sidedness as an enforcement tool that the 1990 assembly reversed its position on employer sanctions (from 1981) and, in that light, opposed the option of a right-to-work document. In refugee policy, assemblies have called for nondiscrimination in distributing aid and in the implementation of laws and policies. In summary, as follows:

- Eliminate discrimination based on race, color, national origin, or creed (1948, 1949, 1954, 1963, 1981, 1990);

- Oppose treatment of persons as second class citizens.

- Oppose all expressions of racism and exercise vigilance to ensure racism is not present in the implementation of laws and policies.

- Favor nondiscrimination in the distribution of humanitarian aid and in the application of laws and policies.

7. *The United States government should ensure that the constitutional rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants to due process of law are protected.*

This is a principle of justice, which assemblies have frequently advocated, often in criticism of government violation of the requirements of due process. For example, the assemblies believed officials frequently disregarded due process in deporting Central American asylum seekers without an opportunity for a fair hearing. Also, the 1981 assembly appealed for the right of due process for undocumented Mexican immigrants who frequently were not given the opportunity for legal protection. Although they do not have legal documents, they have a right to due process when they are apprehended by law-enforcement officials. In summary, as follows:

- Call officials of the U.S. government to implement faithfully the constitutional requirements of due process in the treatment of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants (both documented and undocumented).

- Oppose deportation of asylum seekers without access to provisions of due process.

- Ensure due process in determination of the status of refugees and asylum seekers.

8. *Sovereign nations should exercise their authority to regulate immigration with a presumption toward generosity rather than restrictiveness.*

General Assemblies have never advocated an open border policy. Generally they have assumed the existence of the nation-state system and called on nations to respond generously and justly to the circumstances of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants. There has always been the assumption that some kinds of controls are necessary. The 1963 assembly maintained that it is appropriate to consider the vital interests of citizens in terms of national security and economic well-being in addition to the needs of persons seeking admission. The 1994 assembly recognized there are some short-term costs in receiving immigrants even as the country benefits over the long term. Assemblies favored receiving asylum seekers from Central America, clearly differentiating between those persons who were in danger or feared they were, and those who were not. Whenever the issue of numerical limits is specifically at issue, assemblies have favored greater openness toward receiving newcomers. In summary, as follows:

- Favor increasing the number of legal immigrants from Mexico (1981).
- Favor opening immigration to countries with the most acute population surpluses (1954—a time when U.S. policy still discriminated against non-European peoples).
- Favor generosity in the level of support for refugee resettlement.
- Favor generosity in granting temporary asylum or extended voluntary departure to asylum seekers.
- Favor the principle of burden sharing so that federal resources are returned to local areas that absorb a disproportionate share of short-term costs in receiving immigrants.

9. *The United States should open jobs to neighbors with a strong and continuing historical connection who need and want to work so long as there are jobs available and the poor already residing in the United States are not further disadvantaged.*

The 1981 assembly adopted this contextual principle of justice in addressing the special relationship between the United States and Mexico. Again, the assemblies recognized the legitimacy of national limitations on immigration. But the primary calculus should be the availability of jobs and the impact on the poor living in the United States. This principle has not been tested in relation to broader (beyond Mexico) considerations of limits on immigration. As of now, it has a specific application, not a general one. But it does suggest one way that Presbyterians might deal with questions about how many immigrants should be received in the U.S. In summary, as follows:

- Favor a special relationship with Mexico.

- Favor increasing the number of legal immigrants from Mexico.

10. *Restrictions on immigration should be enforced humanely.*

General Assemblies have not often addressed the thorny questions about what kinds of enforcement of immigration laws are worthy of Christian support. In the 1981 policy, the assemblies struggled with how to secure justice for undocumented Mexican workers, while also assuring effective mechanisms for limiting the flow of immigrants. As we have seen their answer was to support employer sanctions and the use of a right-to-work document. In other words, the controls would be at the point of access to work as well as at the border. As we have also seen, the 1990 assembly reversed this support and declared its opposition both to employer sanctions and the right to work document, because they were deemed discriminatory. A recent assembly addressed inhumane and unfair enforcement along the border, pointing to charges about selectivity in enforcement, temporary detention, the use of deadly force, high-speed chases, and the mistreatment of juveniles (1993). In summary, as follows:

- Oppose employer sanctions (1990).

- Oppose right to work document (1990).

- Favor establishment of an independent commission to investigate complaints against the Border Patrol along the border with Mexico (1993).

11. *The U. S. government should make the causes of human displacement a major priority in U.S. foreign policy* (1990).

Assemblies have on several occasions called on the U.S. government to act in ways that will eliminate basic causes for refugee movements (1982) and move toward solutions to the worldwide refugee crises (1959). The 1983 assembly adopted a substantive statement on the scope and gravity of the worldwide refugee crisis. This statement provided a comprehensive analysis of the causes of refugees and showed conclusively the need for governments to address social, political, and economic conditions, as well as to respond effectively to the immediate needs of refugees. This analysis provides a thorough background for assemblies' continuing attention to this principle. National receptivity of refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants, no matter how generous, cannot be an adequate response to the massive number of people who are on the move. The 1981 assembly gave explicit attention to this principle when it called for U.S. government initiatives to contribute to positive development in Mexico, which can reduce the need for Mexicans to leave their country to find work. In summary, as follows:

- Call on the U.S. government to address international conditions that compel people to move and make these conditions a major component of its foreign policy (1990).

- Call on the U.S. to help relieve pressures in Mexico that lead many persons to emigrate, and to promote positive development in Mexico that is measured principally by its impact on the most desperately poor (1981).

ENDNOTES

1. Refugees. Refugees are defined in international law as persons who have "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." Refugees are generally members of large groups who are uprooted from their homeland and compelled to cross national borders in order to find a place where they can be safe from persecution and danger. In the policy of the United States, refugees seek admission to the U.S. from abroad and, when their application is approved, they enter the U.S. with short-term financial assistance to help them get settled. Often, refugees have been emotionally and physically wounded by the circumstances that required them to escape. Many wait a long time in restrictive and isolated camps before they are received into the United States.

2. Asylum Seekers. Asylum seekers are really a type of refugee because they, too, are trying to escape from life threatening violence and have a well-founded fear of persecution in their home countries. But they come to the United States (or another country) as individuals often without documents and apply for asylum. According to international law, persons have the right to seek asylum in another country. This right is crucial because often persons must leave their homeland quickly without the time or protection to seek a visa from a foreign government or a passport from the government that is persecuting them. International law also upholds non-refoulement, which means that it is unlawful to return asylum seekers involuntarily to the country from which they have escaped. Prior to 1980, the number of people seeking asylum in the U.S. was not high. However, after that date large numbers of persons from the Caribbean and Central America entered the U.S. as asylum seekers. These have sometimes occasioned intense controversies. The numbers have been lower in recent years, except for the large backlog of Central American cases.

3. Immigrants. Immigrants are persons who choose to leave their homeland and move to a different country to live and establish roots. There are many reasons for seeking a new homeland, and immigrants vary greatly in their life circumstances. Some, indeed, are very poor, and they emigrate in order to find work and to provide for their families. But their lives are not endangered in the same sense as refugees, nor are they singled out for persecution. Immigrants represent well a kind of transnational identity because they often also want to maintain ties with their country of origin. In international law, the needs and moral claims of immigrants are not regarded as weighty as those of refugees or asylum seekers. Refugees are often referred to as "forced migrants." Given a reasonable choice, refugees would remain in their homeland. Immigrants, however, "choose" to move to a new country. Yet immigrants may experience acute deprivation, outright exploitation, and severe discrimination, both in the old country and in the new country. In the experience of many church workers, the distinctions between refugee, asylum seeker, and poor immigrant tend to blur as we encounter them as persons. Because of complex political and economic factors, it is often extremely difficult to determine a person's reasons for flight or fear.

A STUDY AND REFLECTION GUIDE ON "TRANSFORMATION OF CHURCHES AND SOCIETY THROUGH ENCOUNTERS WITH NEW NEIGHBORS"

Prepared by Nancy J. Benson-Nicol, former Vice Chair
Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Guided by the assumption that God intends for believers to seek the well-being of all people, this study/action guide explores the ways in which immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers may be welcomed in full fellowship and partnership by citizens of the United States. Fundamentally, the study seeks to emphasize the importance of promoting reciprocity within these relationships, ensuring the balanced participation of both newcomers and citizens in identifying and accomplishing shared goals.

Each congregation or organization approaches this study with different levels of experience and involvement in immigration issues. A vast number of churches in the United states are, historically speaking, the products of the efforts of newcomers from many nations to nourish communities of faith. These churches vary in the extent to which new neighbors compose their congregations today. Much new church growth is the result of the arrival of recent immigrants from all parts of the globe. As much as possible, this study guide endeavors to facilitate meaningful reflection and discussion of immigration issues for the broadest scope of familiarity represented by the membership of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Churches and organizations rich in information and resources on these issues are encouraged to incorporate such resources within this study and to share them with others. For churches that are interested in exploring ways in which to become more informed and involved in these issues, a list of church-related organizations committed to immigration issues is provided within this guide.

It is strongly encouraged that groups making use of this study take advantage of opportunities to invite guest speakers to educate and join in dialogue with study group participants. This can only aid in enriching learning and growth about these issues.

NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR:

Despite the fact that each study group is unique, there are general principles to guide facilitators in ensuring that their group fosters informed, open, and uplifting participation.

Creating a Safe Space

Many of the discussions will center on participants' own experiences, feelings, and beliefs. In order to make candid and open contributions to discussions, they must feel that what they say will not be used destructively against them, *that they will be safe in sharing of themselves with fellow participants.* It is vital to establish ground rules in the very beginning that facilitate a safe environment. These include:

- Forbidding the use of obscene or derogatory language in reference to individuals and/or groups of people.
- Making confidentiality mandatory so that no comments shared within the group by a participant can be repeated outside of the group to anyone without the expressed consent of the group participant.
- Soliciting the input of everyone in the group, and guarding against domination of conversation by one voice or viewpoint.
- Encouraging participants to communicate when they are feeling uncomfortable about or unsure of the tone or feeling of discussion.

Ensuring Diverse and Balanced Participation

A major hope underlying the creation of the policy statement and study guide is that individuals and groups will feel led to expand their associations and interactions with others different from themselves. This may mean that study groups invite others of different races, social classes, or religious backgrounds to be in dialogue about their experiences. Arranged thoughtfully,

these connections can only serve to enrich learning and growth. Whenever possible, the study group should be balanced in composition by gender, race, age, and social class. Some things to consider when dealing with such balance:

- Make sure that anyone who is interested or may be interested in participating in the study is encouraged to do so.

- Be careful to avoid placing the burden of discussion regarding specific subjects on participants who are representative of a certain group. For instance, if only one man of color is a member of the study group, do not expect or require him to bear the sole responsibility of addressing any and all issues regarding men of color, and so on.
- If feasible, you may wish to arrange a joint session or two with a neighboring congregation or group that is engaging in the study as well.

At the beginning of the first session, outline clearly the ground rules for discussion, and solicit suggestions from the participants about any further issues of concern.

Preparing for Session 1

Prior to the first session, make sure all participants receive a copy of the Resolution, *Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounter with New Neighbors*, including the Recommendations session. Participants should read the resolution portion of the document, along with the recommendations, before the first session. Much of the first session should focus primarily on personal introductions, and should also acquaint participants with the scope of the study and issues to be covered. As a part of the personal introductions, ask participants to identify what their experiences have been with immigrants, and what they hope to learn by engaging in the study group.

Materials

These materials should regularly come in handy:

· Large sheets of paper and markers *or* a chalkboard and chalk.

· Copies of the *Transformation of Churches and Society Through Encounters with New Neighbors* resolution with recommendations and study guide.

· Bible.

· *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Appendix A).

· List of Organizations (Appendix B).

SESSION 1

Scripture:

Acts 10, 11:1–18

Prayer:

Eternal God, grant us a vision of fellowship and partnership through, among, and across cultures. Open our eyes to the intertwined destinies we all share as we seek your guidance, now and always. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Reading:

Resolution (pp. 1–2).

Exercise:

Divide the large group into small groups comprised of no more than eight people each. Instruct them to write down all of the adjectives or descriptive phrases that come to mind when they think of immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Allot no more than twenty-five minutes for this exercise. Reconvene the large group and post the lists of adjectives prominently in the room. Note what adjectives appear commonly throughout the four lists. Pay attention to positive and negative descriptions used. Discuss the meaning of "immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers."

Discussion:

- Peter's immediate reaction to the creatures in his vision was to label them profane and unclean. It may be said that he relied on internalized cultural cues to determine that the creatures were unclean, yet God ultimately rendered them clean regardless. How do you see aspects of contemporary culture—the media, entertainment, laws, schools, even some traditions of the church—as barriers to seeing God's plan for human relationships? As aids to seeing God's plan? [Probe: Do any of these aspects of culture reinforce some of the negative or positive adjectives listed by the groups?]

- Peter and Cornelius both experienced visions from God imparting messages to them. The message of these visions revealed the linked destiny God had intended for Peter and Cornelius in ministry and fellowship. What are some present signs of God's work in linking the shared destinies of U.S. citizens and immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers? If so, what are they?

Assignment for Next Session:

Rationale—"A Story" and "Reflections" (pp. 7–9);
Recommendations—Items a.1.–8.; c.1.–8. (pp. 3–4).

SESSION 2

Scripture:

Matthew 25:35–40

Prayer:

God, we never know when the "least" of us may offer us the greatest hope for blessings and redemption in your name. Compel us to act as loving servants toward one another, not in anticipation of personal gain, but for the glory of Jesus' name. Amen.

Reading:

Rationale—"A Story" and "Reflections" (pp. 7–9);
Recommendations—Items a.1.–8., c.1.–8. (pp. 3–4).

Discussion:

- According to "A Story" in the reading for this session, Mauricio originally immigrated to the U.S. as an atheist, then later became a Christian. What are your own perceptions of immigrants who are not Christians? Would you feel as great a sense of responsibility toward non-Christian as Christian immigrants? Why or why not?

- How might the increased opportunities and resources Mauricio encountered in the U.S. played a role in making him more receptive to the Christian message of salvation? How might they have hindered his receptivity?

- Do the principles listed in recommendations "a.1.–8." seem appropriate for Mauricio's situation? Are they still appropriate in today's historical context? Why or why not?

- What possibilities currently exist within your church or organization to forge partnerships among immigrants and naturalized citizens?

Assignment for Next Session:

Rationale—"Current Public Policy Issues" (pp. 9–11);
Recommendations—Items b.1.–11. (p. 3).

SESSION 3

Scripture:

Luke 10:29–37

Prayer:

By a common faith, God, we are bound to model our ways as the Good Samaritan. Shake us free from our "comfort zones" and lead us to the paths of love rooted sublimely in your service. Amen.

Reading:

Rationale—"Current Public Policy Issues" (pp. 9–11);
Recommendation—Items b.1.–11. (p. 3).

Discussion:

- What are current aspects of U.S. immigration policies, as presented in the reading for this session, that are potentially dangerous and harmful to newcomers?
- What factors may have contributed to the "negative reaction to newcomers building in the United States" in the 1990s?
- In light of the recommendations assigned for this session, what, in your opinion, do you see as the proper role of churches in relation to the government on these issues?
- In what ways can the church serve as a sanctuary for asylum-seekers who face deportation?

Assignment for Next Session:

Rationale—"Historical Perspectives: Refugees and Asylum Seekers" (pp. 11–12).

SESSION 4

Scripture:

Ezra 8:21–23

Prayer:

Our ancestors have borne great struggles just to survive, Dear Lord. In common with them, many of us still undergo great pains in building our lives. Strengthen us on our journeys. Let us help each other along the way as we are able. Teach us, Holy Spirit, to make this prayer truly in Jesus' name, in spirit and in truth. Amen.

Reading:

Rationale—"Historical Perspectives: Refugees and Asylum Seekers"(pp. 11–12).

Discussion:

- Consider the policies approved by General Assemblies during each different time period mentioned in the selected reading. Do any policies seem more effective than others at any given time?
- What group(s) of people are the primary ones addressed by these past policies? Why?
- Has your congregation or organization been affected significantly by these policies throughout its history? If so, in what ways?
- Why does asylum seem such a central concept throughout Scriptures? Is it also central in the contemporary life of the church? Why or why not?

Assignment for Next Session:

Rationale—"Historical Perspective: Immigrants" (pp. 12–14);
Recommendations—Items d.–h., l. (pp. 4, 5).

SESSION 5

Scripture:

Acts 12:6–11

Prayer:

Some of us have been bound unjustly by physical chains, Lord. Too often, others of us are bound in fear and ignorance in disconnecting ourselves from those who seek fellowship with us. Let us not be doomed to repeat the mistakes of our past, but determined to duplicate the life-affirming legacies of our history. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Reading:

Rationale—"Historical Perspective: Immigrants"(pp. 12–14);
Recommendations d.–h.., l. (pp. 4, 5).

Discussion:

- Consider the policies approved by General Assemblies during different time periods. Do any policies seem more effective than others at any given time?
- What group(s) of people are the primary ones addressed by these past policies? Why?
- What are some differences between recent immigrants and earlier immigrants who are now citizens of the U.S.? How are the dynamics of their acceptance into this country similar and different?
- Discuss the current status of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996. How is it affecting immigrants?
- How do concerns about the apportionment of resources affect the dynamics between recent immigrants and long-time citizens of the U.S.? Discussion Recommendation d.–h., l.

Assignment for Next Session:

Rationale—"Theological and Ethical Basis for Policy" (pp. 14–17);
Recommendations—Items i.–n. (pp. 4–5).

SESSION 6

Scripture:

Jeremiah 7:5–6

Prayer:

Teach us how to amend our ways, O Lord, and help us to instruct one another. May we work together toward the goal of preparing a space worthy of your presence and favor. Amen.

Reading:

Rationale—"Theological and Ethical Basis for Policy"(pp. 14–17);
Recommendations—Items i.–n. (pp. 4–5).

Discussion:

- Turn to the eight "Theological and Ethical Bases for Policy " from the reading for this session. Examine how each of these principles interact with the basic principles guiding your church or organization in its outreach to those in need.

- How does your church or organization identify as "those in need" through what it does? Are the actions consistent with the eight principles? What efforts may need to be developed or imagined?

Exercise:

Divide the large group into four small groups. Assign two principles from the reading to each group. Have each group brainstorm and compose a list of actions to increase the promotion of these principles (1) in the church (or organization), (2) as individuals.

After twenty to thirty minutes, reconvene the large group. Invite a representative from each small group to share the initiatives imagined by each group.

Assignment for Next Session:

Rationale—"Policy Principles" (pp. 17–21).

SESSION 7

Scripture:

Psalm 133

Prayer:

Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, anoint our spirits and our actions with the resplendent wonder of unity among us. Make us bearers of your good, pleasing, and perfect will. Amen.

Reading:

Rationale—"Policy Principles" (pp. 17–21)**.**

Discussion:

- Reconsider the "Theological and Ethical Basis for Policy." How do the "Policy Principles" build on these bases?
- How do you as an individual now see your role in relationship to these issues? Have your perceptions changed from when you began this study? If so, how?
- Review the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"
- What do you find encouraging about the church's involvement in issues affecting immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers? What do you see as the potential for fostering partnerships that are geared toward building relationships between new neighbors and current citizens?
- Discuss ways of implementing some of the policy principles in your church or organization.

APPENDIX A

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

[Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly of the
United Nations resolution 217 A(II) of 10 December 1948.]

Preamble

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be projected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in cooperation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, therefore, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY *proclaims*

This Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11

1. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

2. No one shall be held guilty of any penal offense on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offense, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offense was committed.

Article 12

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.

2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14

1. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising form non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.

2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitations due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17

1. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

2. Everyone has the right of equal access of public service in his country.

3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

3. These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

[This information copied from *The International Bill of Human Rights*, Department of Public Information (United Nations: New York, 1985) pp. 4–9).]

APPENDIX B

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS:

Alliance for African Assistance
Attn: Mr. Walter Lam
3148 University Avenue
San Diego, CA 92104
Program directed to assist refugees in becoming self-sufficient

American Beginnings
Attn: Rev. John Goldstein
2215 South 8th Avenue
Yuma, AZ 85366-0110
Immigrant Outreach Campaign, San Diego

Center for New Americans
Attn: Guity Kiani, Executive Director
2020 North Broadway, Suite 209
Walnut Creek, CA 94596
Employment assistance to low income immigrants and refugees

Florence Immigrants and Refugee Rights Project
Attn: Elizabeth Dallam
PO Box 654
Florence, AZ 85232
Legal rights presentations and pro-bono legal representation at INS hearings

Freedom House
2630 West Lafayette Street
Attn: Lynne Partington
Detroit, MI 48216
Program resettling UN protocol indigent refugees into Canada

Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights
995 Market Street, Suite 702
San Francisco, CA 94103
Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights

Las Americas Refugee Asylum Project (LARAP)
Attn.: Ada Gonzalez-Peterson
715 Myrtle Avenue
El Paso, TX 79901
Legal assistance to men, women and children in INS detention facilities

National Coalition for Haitians Rights
Attn: Jocelyn McCalla, Executive Director
275 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
To support the Haitian Rights Campaign

Northwest Immigrants Rights Project
909 8th Avenue
Attn: Vicky Stifter
Seattle, WA 98104
Representation, advice and advocacy for asylum seekers

Proyecto Adelante, Inc.
Attn: Paul Glaser-Kerr
PO Box 223641,3100 Grossman Avenue
Dallas, TX 75222
Legal services for refugees and immigrants seeking asylum in the US

Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees
5404 N. Alameda Drive
Attn. Ms. Penny Strauss, Director
Portland, OR 97213
PDA First Asylum grant

Tucson Ecumenical Council Legal
Attn: Keith Schaeffer
631 South 6th Avenue
Tucson, AZ 85701
Asylum representation and legal services to refugees and refugee youth in detention

VIVE, Inc.
Attn: Rev. John Long
50 Wyoming Street
Buffalo, NY 14215
Shelter and services for refugees seeking asylum in Canada

Vermont Refugee Assistance, Inc.
Attn: Patrick Giantonio
7 Court Street
Montpelier, VT 05602
Legal services for Canadian and US asylum applicants