

I join Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold in his call for “just and humane” immigration reform. We, who find God’s will revealed in the Holy Scripture and in Jesus, the Word made Flesh; we, who endeavor to follow and obey Christ as our Lord and Savior; we, who promise, with God’s help, to live our vows in the Baptismal Covenant; we now join with other Christians, other believers and all people of good will to advocate for immigrant workers and for the provision of hospitality and justice for these neighbors.

Let us not allow unwarranted fears or harsh measures to shape our immigration system. We cannot make our nation safe by discarding justice or criminalizing compassion for the poor and the oppressed. We cannot make our own citizens secure by passing unjust legislation that would make assistance rendered to immigrants against the law.

I commend the comments of our Presiding Bishop, along with the Resolution adopted by the House of Bishops last week, to all members of the Diocese of New Jersey. Let us recall the words of our Lord, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25: 35).

The Rt. Rev. George E. Councill  
Bishop of New Jersey

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Griswold urges 'just and humane' immigration reform

[Episcopal News Service] Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold has issued a statement in support of Senate action on immigration reform which creates more opportunities for immigrant workers to enter the United States legally and for those already here without legal status to regularize their status, rather than be detained or deported.

Calling for Congressional action that is “just and humane,” Griswold underscored that “as Christians, we are called to remember the Gospel mandate to extend hospitality to the stranger. As Episcopalians we embrace a baptismal covenant which requires that we seek and serve Christ in all persons. It is primarily for these reasons that we ask the Senate to reject those measures now before it which are essentially punitive and impractical.”

The statement notes further that “basing national policy on fear of the stranger and a rejection of those newcomers whose gifts we need is in conflict with the teachings of the Gospel.”

The Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by Senator Arlen Specter (R- PA) of Pennsylvania, is expected to complete work this week on the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006. Church activists from more than 35 states converged on Capitol Hill on Monday, March 27 to express strong support for legislation that allows workers to enter the U.S. legally and offers a chance for those already here without documentation to eventually earn legal status.

National Action for Immigrant Rights, a coalition of groups from around the country, has called on church leaders to indicate strong disapproval for the House version of immigration reform, which focused exclusively on enforcement measures, including the criminalization of 11 million now in the US without status, and to affirm America's commitment to "humane and fair solutions" to a broken immigration system.

Many aspects of the House-passed bill advanced by Representative James Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin (R-WI), an Episcopalian, are included in Senator Specter's legislation. Amendments are being proposed which would reverse the more punitive aspects of the Specter bill. Faith based groups are actively pressing for measures that give workers from outside the U.S. legal access to work in the U.S. and over time allows those workers who are here without valid papers to become legal.

Another key concern of church leaders has been attempts in both the House and Senate to make assistance rendered to immigrants who are undocumented against the law. In Monday's Judiciary Committee mark-up of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act, Senator Durbin of Illinois offered an amendment that passed which would exclude religious workers and organizations from being deemed criminal smugglers if they offer assistance to individuals along our borders. The amendment would allow religious workers or organizations "to provide humanitarian assistance including medical care, housing counseling, victim services and food, or to transport the alien to a location where such assistance can be rendered."

Richard Parkins, director of Episcopal Migration Ministries, joined Episcopal clergy and lay persons assembling in Washington to advocate for positive and comprehensive immigration reform, where he noted that the statement of the Presiding Bishop reflects not only the sentiments of the Episcopal Church but also the views of a broad spectrum of faith groups who want a just and humane immigration system.

Parkins expressed hope that "this opportunity to reform our failed immigration system should not be missed. There are compelling moral, humanitarian, and practical reasons for protecting our immigration system from an overzealous emphasis on enforcement and punishment. We must not surrender our faith traditions to an unwarranted fear of the outsider. We follow a Gospel mandate of hospitality. We must vigorously assert that mandate as we appeal to our legislators."

The full text of the Presiding Bishop's statement follows.

#### A Statement from the Presiding Bishop

Congress is now considering legislation to respond to thousands who seek to enter the United States to improve their lives and the lives of their families, as well as those several million workers who remain in our country without legal status. As Christians, we are called to remember the Gospel mandate to extend hospitality to the stranger. As Episcopalians, we embrace a baptismal covenant which requires that we seek and serve Christ in all persons. It is primarily for these reasons that we ask the Senate to press for a just and humane immigration system and reject those measures now before it which are essentially punitive and impractical.

The Episcopal Church has adopted the following principles that we think should guide the Senate's action on immigration legislation:

- permit the orderly entry of legal workers to the US to respond to recognized labor force needs,
- ensure that close family members be allowed to enter or be reunited with individuals legally entering the US to accept employment,
- permit undocumented migrants residing in the US at the time of the enactment of legislation to pursue legal residence and eventual citizenship if they are employed or responding to an offer of employment,
- ensure that migrants working legally in the US be granted the rights and benefits accorded US workers, including the right to change employment.

I believe that legislation which does not acknowledge the poverty which compels persons to take incredible risks to cross borders and ignores sectors of our economy that need workers is both unworkable and immoral. While there are those who would invest in higher walls and more elaborate fences or punish those whose only crime is to escape the curse of grinding poverty, we espouse a more humane and workable approach. We support a system which permits the orderly and legal movement of a significantly larger number of workers to the U.S., extending to them the opportunity to become permanent members of our communities if that is their choice.

Also as Congress debates the fate of 11 million undocumented persons who currently reside in the U.S., it is important to recognize their contributions to and investment in our communities and thus provide them with an avenue to move from the shadows into full, legal participation in our society. Criminalizing those who have honestly contributed their labor is the wrong response.

We also reject attempts to make unlawful those acts of kindness which we offer to the stranger, regardless of their immigration status, and we will encourage Episcopalians to resist all unwarranted incursions into the faith we profess and practice.

Basing national policy on fear of the stranger and a rejection of those newcomers whose gifts we need is in conflict with the teachings in the gospels. I believe that the fear that has motivated recent legislation effecting immigrants could mislead us to assume that fortresses and prisons will make us secure and that principles of justice and compassion can be discarded. To make enforcement a central provision of our immigration policy not only fails to honor our historic tradition of offering refuge to the oppressed, but also denies the call of Christ to welcome the stranger as if we were receiving Him as our guest. I urge the Senate to adopt legislation which, while respecting legitimate security concerns, affirms us as a nation which follows a generous and fair immigration policy.

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold  
Presiding Bishop and Primate  
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Care for undocumented immigrants affirmed; Bishops oppose legislation that would make humanitarian acts unlawful

The House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church on March 22 adopted a resolution "opposing legislation making humanitarian acts unlawful" regarding care and aid extended to "undocumented immigrants."

The full text of the resolution -- proposed by Bishops of Dioceses on the Mexican Border and moved by Bishop Kirk Smith of Arizona -- follows.

Opposing legislation making humanitarian acts unlawful

RESOLVED, that the House of Bishops, meeting at Kanuga, March 17-22, 2006, reaffirming the action of Executive Council, meeting in Philadelphia, March 6-9, 2006, declares its strong opposition to any legislation that would make it unlawful for faith-based or humanitarian organizations to act to relieve the suffering of undocumented immigrants in response to the Gospel mandate to serve the least among us and our Baptismal covenant to seek and serve Christ in all persons;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House of Bishops calls upon the people of the Episcopal Church to act on their Baptismal covenant without regard to such unjust legislation.

EXPLANATION: The Episcopal Church has a long tradition of advocating for the just and humane treatment of immigrants and refugees. In the current immigration debate, there is concern that attempts to change the U.S. immigration system could infringe upon the rights and obligations of religious and humanitarian organizations to extend support and assistance to those who come to them for help. The Gospel mandate to serve the least among us and the Baptismal covenant of the Church to seek and serve Christ in all persons are imperatives that call us to resist legislation that would make unlawful deeds of compassion done in the name of our faith. The Episcopal Church, therefore, identifies with expressions of other faith-based bodies who have expressed opposition to proposed legislation that would inhibit the ability of churches, their members and agencies to relieve the suffering of those whom they are called to serve.