A RESOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS

The New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ (NHCUCC) Stands in Solidarity with the Maranatha Indonesian UCC in Madbury and with its Members (and Other NH Immigrants Similarly Situated) Who Face the Threat of Deportation – and Calls Upon All Settings of the NHCUCC to Provide Welcome, Support and/or Sanctuary for New and Long-Term Immigrants and Asylum Seekers in Our Communities

Submitted by following NHCUCC Mission Groups: Immigration, Economic Justice, Racial Justice, and Peace With Justice Advocates. For more information, contact:

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SUMMARY

This resolution calls for the NHCUCC in all its settings (Local Churches, individual church members, Associations, and Conference) to offer spiritual or physical support, advocacy and/or sanctuary that will aid immigrants and asylum seekers within NH communities in feeling genuinely safe and welcome and, when needed, in disentangling from detention or deportation orders. This resolution also calls for individuals and settings of the NHCUCC to stand in solidarity with and provide support for the Maranatha Indonesian UCC in Madbury and for its members who face unconscionable threats to their safety, security, and family unity due to actions of the U.S. office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

BACKGROUND – and STATEMENT OF NEED

Our denomination, the United Church of Christ, has a proud history of offering an extravagant welcome to all of God’s children regardless of their national origin, faith practice, or citizenship…
status. In both past and present, the UCC (see http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration) has clearly articulated that, as Christians, we are called to love our neighbors and welcome the immigrant (the Bible often uses the word “alien”). Most recently, to underscore that no human is illegal and that love of neighbor is foundational to our faith, in a Resolution of Witness “On Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Church,” delegates to the 2017 General Synod emphatically affirmed the UCC as a denomination that welcomes immigrants and called upon the churches of the UCC “to become active Immigrant Welcoming Congregations” (see http://synod.uccpages.org/resolutions/).

Despite the tenets of our faith, our country and state are now experiencing a tragic and frightening resurgence of hateful rhetoric and policy proposals aimed at the most vulnerable in our communities who have immigrated to or sought refuge in this country simply to find respite from violence and oppression, to protect their families, to work hard, and to seek a better life. Thankfully, we are also witnessing a parallel faith-led resurgence of a “New Sanctuary Movement” that aims to provide support and protection for immigrants and refugees facing violence, discrimination, or deportation. This movement aims to organize people of faith and moral courage to stand with and accompany those who are in the crosshairs of anti-immigrant rhetoric or policy proposals or deportation actions.

RATIONALE

WHEREAS, all individuals are God’s children, no matter what their race, creed, country of origin, or immigration status may be;

And WHEREAS, in New Hampshire a number of our UCC Indonesian brothers and sisters from the Maranatha Indonesian United Church of Christ in Madbury -- as well Indonesians from other NH faith communities and immigrants and asylum seekers from other ethnicities, religions, and NH communities – have been imprisoned or continue to face unconscionable and morally indefensible deportation orders after having lived as productive residents of New Hampshire for many years;*

And WHEREAS, we in the NHCUCC are profoundly disturbed by the rise of overt xenophobia and racism in our midst and by ever harsher anti-immigrant legislation and by policies that enable private corporations to profit from the incarceration of immigrants and refugees;

And WHEREAS, we in the NHCUCC likewise are profoundly disturbed by the rejection of Syrian and other refugees from Muslim majority countries as well as the rejection of unaccompanied children crossing the U.S. southern border to seek safety and security;

And WHEREAS, the Bible, in both Old and New Testament, has much to say about immigrants and immigration as exemplified by Leviticus 19:33-34 where it is proclaimed “When the alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” and by Hebrews 13:1 where it is proclaimed

* Note: On August 1, when many of our Indonesian brothers and sisters reported for their regular check-ins with ICE, one of our brothers was immediately placed in immigrant detention and six others, who together with family members number 19 people, were told to buy plane tickets and appear at their next check-in with tickets to Indonesia in hand. On this same date, others reporting to ICE from varied countries were also detained or received the same deportation order.
“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

and by the birth story of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus and his family were forced to migrate to Egypt to seek safety from oppression and escape from he threatened murder of the baby Jesus;

And WHEREAS, according to World Relief/Immigration Alliance “the Hebrew word ger, the closest word to our concept of an immigrant, appears 92 times in the Old Testament alone” and God is a God of justice who calls upon us to love the stranger and the immigrant, including providing them food, clothing and shelter (http://welcomingthestranger.com/wp_welcoming/learn-and-discern/scripture-and-immigration) – and in Jesus’ own words in the New Testament, we find parables about the divine imperative to welcome and embrace the other, the stranger, and the one with a different ethnicity (for example, the Samaritan);

And WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ has spoken boldly and eloquently in the past and present about the theological imperative that we stand united with our immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters, as exemplified in the following General Synod Pronouncement and Resolutions:

- General Synod 13/1981: A Pronouncement: Justice in Immigration
- General Synod 20/1995: Affirming the Dignity and Self-Worth of Immigrants
- General Synod 23/2001: Emergency Resolution to End the Death of Migrants on the United States-Mexico Border by Offering Water in Christ’s Name
- General Synod 29/2013: Resolution Supporting Compassionate Comprehensive Immigration Reform and the Protection of the Human Rights of Immigrants
- General Synod 31/2017: On Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Church;

And WHEREAS, on October 23, 2010, the NH Conference, United Church of Christ adopted a “Resolution of Solidarity with Immigrants and the Southwest Conference/UCC” decrying the treatment of immigrants by the State of Arizona and also embracing the UCC’s 36-year-old articulation of how all settings of the UCC should bring about “justice in immigration” by doing the following:

a. Advocate for the rights of immigrants.
b. Aid undocumented immigrants in attaining legal status.
c. Aid immigrants in reunification with their families and in placement in areas of the country most favorable for their productive participation in society.
d. Assist in meeting the social welfare needs of immigrants; and
e. Be inclusive of immigrants in existing and new churches.

And WHEREAS, aiding undocumented immigrants and those seeking refugee status in attaining legal status, achieving family reunification, and addressing their social welfare needs (as our denomination called upon us to do over 36 years ago) includes varied actions such as prayer, advocacy, protest, our physical presence in a show of solidarity, financial support and/or even provision of physical sanctuary;
And **WHEREAS**, our faith is tested not when our actions are easy but rather when they are challenging;

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT**

Now (2017 and 2018 and beyond) is the time for the people and settings of the United Church of Christ in New Hampshire to lift up our prophetic and moral witness against the unjust systems of power and privilege that keep our immigrant, refugee and asylum-seeking neighbors from living with the safety and dignity they deserve as human beings and as children of God;

**AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT**

NHCUCC Local Churches, individual church members, Associations, and Conference Ministries and Mission Groups are encouraged to enter into a time of discernment and action to determine how we are individually and/or collectively called to bear this moral witness, whether it be

- holding individuals facing denigration or deportation in prayer on an ongoing basis;
- becoming better educated about what our faith and our denomination say about immigrants and immigration by turning to the wealth of UCC and other resources as found or listed at [http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration](http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration) and as provided by the new Sanctuary Movement (see [http://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/](http://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/)) and its interfaith Sanctuary Toolkit ([http://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/uploads/7/6/9/1/76912017/interfaith_sanctuary_toolkit.pdf](http://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/uploads/7/6/9/1/76912017/interfaith_sanctuary_toolkit.pdf)), as well as the ACLU FAQ for churches considering offering sanctuary to immigrants or refugees ([http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/ACLU-Sanctuary-FAQ-4-13-2017.pdf](http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/ACLU-Sanctuary-FAQ-4-13-2017.pdf));
- being a faith witness at ICE check-ins or other settings where our public prayer and presence are powerful statements of our support for our immigrant brothers and sisters;
- being an advocate for changing federal policies and attitudes toward immigrants, including immigrant children who know only the U.S. as their homeland;
- supporting and working with relevant immigrant advocacy organizations and the NHCUCC’s own Immigration Working Group on a range of immigrant support and advocacy efforts;
- providing financial support to the Maranatha Indonesian UCC and making financial contributions for the benefit of immigrants in crisis and under deportation orders or threat (such as contributions toward the cost of legal services or bail support, the cost of plane tickets for NH immigrant or asylum seekers who are complying with deportation orders, and other needed individual or family legal or social welfare support as identified by NHCUCC entities or partnering immigrant advocacy organizations);
- as a congregation, becoming part of the recently formed New Hampshire Immigrant Solidary Network, through which each faith community within the network determines for itself what role it will play in terms of providing sanctuary, support, accompaniment and/or advocacy;
- deciding, as a congregation, to make your house of worship a place of physical sanctuary for immigrants and refugees living in New Hampshire who desire to stay in NH while they challenge a deportation order; OR
- undertaking other activities or actions as our faith calls us in order to live out the biblical imperatives of welcoming the strangers and aliens among us and loving our neighbors.
AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT

The NHCUCC urges its Board of Directors to expeditiously consider signing on the NHCUCC as a named part of the New Hampshire Immigrant Solidarity Network (devoted to Sanctuary, Support, Accompaniment and Advocacy), understanding that NHCUCC Local Churches, individual church members, Associations, and Conference Ministries and Mission Groups will determine for themselves the role they will play in terms of standing in solidarity with our immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters.

PLAN OF ACTION

IMPLEMENTING BODIES:

Four Mission Groups of the NHCUCC Justice and Witness Ministry – Immigration, Economic Justice, Racial Justice, and Peace With Justice Advocates – will be leaders in increasing awareness of and promoting or carrying out aspects of this resolution in accordance with their specific action priorities and budgets.

Relevant NHCUCC entities will receive guidance regarding direct action and immigrant support from the Rev. Sandra Pontoh, Pastor of the Maranatha Indonesian United Church of Christ, from immigrants and asylum seekers in our midst, or from the immigrant advocacy groups and initiatives with which we are collaborating.

The NHCUCC Immigration Working Group will take the lead in developing a sound and accountable process for directing NHCUCC congregation and member financial contributions so that such contributions can most efficiently and effectively support the legal and social welfare needs of our NH immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters.

The NHCUCC Weekly News will be used as a key tool for educating our congregations about this resolution and these egregious injustices in our midst.

ANTICIPATED COSTS:

No additional NHCUCC budgetary allocation, beyond the existing Justice and Witness Ministry budget, will be needed to publicize or carry out this resolution. Any external contributions made to further the objectives of this Resolution will not impact the NHCUCC budgetary expense line.