

# 1 Mennonite Church USA Churchwide Statement on Immigration

## 3 Introduction

4 Mennonite Church USA has roots in seventeenth-century churches planted by immigrants from  
5 Europe. Our church continues to grow and be enlivened by immigrants who join us from many  
6 countries. As Christians, we believe we are called to welcome these sojourners in our congregations  
7 and communities, especially as our government creates increasingly harsh immigration laws in the  
8 name of fighting terrorism. Assumptions about identity make some people more vulnerable to  
9 political biases and discrimination than others. Our concerns about the status of immigrants in this  
10 country relate to how people are treated based on race, nationality, ethnicity, and religious identity.  
11 *We reject our country's mistreatment of immigrants, repent of our silence, and commit ourselves to*  
12 *act with and on behalf of our immigrant brothers and sisters, regardless of their legal status.*

## 14 Biblical Background

15 The Bible offers us some valuable insights about welcoming strangers, and in our context immigrants  
16 are viewed as strangers. "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do [the  
17 stranger] wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and  
18 you shall love [the stranger] as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt..." (Leviticus  
19 19:33, 34). We affirm that God has called us to welcome immigrants, because all of us are sojourners  
20 (Exodus 23:9, Deuteronomy 24:17, 18). We believe that when we welcome strangers, we welcome  
21 Jesus (Matthew 25:35).

## 23 Immigrants in the United States

24 We may not realize it, but our nation depends economically and culturally on the contributions of  
25 immigrants. Immigrant entrepreneurs, professionals, and artists contribute to the United States'  
26 wealth and diverse culture. Immigrant laborers often work the least desirable jobs.

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28 For many immigrants, however, the opportunities of living in the United States are offset by hardship  
29 and discrimination. They work the most difficult and dangerous jobs for the lowest pay, and  
30 immigrants without documents are frequently cheated out of wages and denied compensation for  
31 work-related injuries. Unfair immigration policies make it difficult to travel across borders, unjust  
32 quota systems discriminate against citizens from some countries, and families are divided by long  
33 delays in document processing. Immigrants in poverty are denied most welfare and healthcare  
34 benefits. Because our society tells us to fear some immigrants more than others, an increasingly  
35 militarized U.S./Mexico border has led to reports of abuse by border guards and hundreds of deaths in  
36 the desert.<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> The Mexico Foreign Relations Office records 1870 deaths from 1995-2001. (There are no statistics for Arizona or Texas until 1996. The U.S. Border Patrol did not begin keeping comprehensive migrant death statistics until FY 1998.)

"However, during the Bush Administration a fairly systematic pattern of increased rights abuses on the part of Border Patrol and other INS agents emerged more plainly from a diverse and much more-expanded body of evidence. This information was reported by human rights groups, the press, congressional committees, the Mexican government, Mexican academic researchers, and even the U.S. Department of Justice. Recorded offenses included beatings, shootings and inappropriate use of firearms, sexual assault, destruction of property, denial of due process, verbal abuse and harassment, inappropriate and illegal searches, substandard detention conditions, and reckless high-speed chases." *The militarization of the US-Mexico Border* by Timothy J. Dunn

38 Since September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration, with the support of others in the government,  
39 has issued new policies and enforced old laws that strike fear in the hearts of immigrant communities,  
40 creating the perception that any contact with government officials or social service agencies might  
41 result in arrest or deportation. Middle Eastern males across the United States are being forced to  
42 register and are deported if their papers are not in order. Haitians and other Caribbean peoples  
43 arriving by boat are being detained without regard for their civil rights and deported even when they  
44 have credible fear of persecution at home. The new Department of Homeland Security, whose stated  
45 mission is to guard the nation against terrorists, now handles immigration and refugee enforcement  
46 and services. Our government's policies lead us to view these strangers as a threat to our safety and  
47 economic security.

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#### 49 **Immigrants in our congregations**

50 Immigrants – documented and undocumented – are members of many Mennonite Church USA  
51 congregations. Immigrant churches face a society whose policies and practices discriminate against  
52 immigrants and people of color. Immigrant churches with undocumented members are deeply  
53 affected by the poverty and fear experienced by many members of their communities; often churches  
54 share the costs of food, shelter, and clothing, assist in job searches, and support families when  
55 members are deported. Undocumented church leaders are often unable or afraid to travel to larger  
56 church gatherings without identification. Congregations without immigrant members are finding their  
57 communities changed by immigration and are struggling with how to respond.

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#### 59 **Our commitment**

60 We affirm individuals and churches that are already working against poverty and fear in immigrant  
61 communities. We affirm those who are speaking to the government about our nation's unjust  
62 immigration policies. We affirm the church's work with anti-racism, while we acknowledge that  
63 much more work remains. We also affirm the church's support of agencies that are addressing the  
64 roots of international inequality, which cause people to emigrate. However, we understand that  
65 because the United States controls more material resources than any other country, people will  
66 continue to immigrate here in search of economic and political stability. Because of our nation's  
67 abundance, because God has called us to welcome the sojourner, and because of the richness that  
68 immigrants bring to the Mennonite Church USA, we commit ourselves to action with and on behalf  
69 of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

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71 *We invite Mennonite Church USA congregations to consider the following actions (resources listed*  
72 *below):*

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- 74 1. Build relationships with newcomers in our communities. Facilitate the mutual sharing of  
75 immigrants' stories and contributions in our churches and neighborhoods.
- 76 2. Plan congregational learning tours in our communities, including immigrant neighborhoods,  
77 churches, and workplaces, as well as government offices that serve immigrants.
- 78 3. Partner with immigrant congregations to plan church services or community events.
- 79 4. Offer church facilities and volunteers for documentation services, English classes, ethnic  
80 celebrations, or other outreach programs.
- 81 5. Engage in mutual aid to offer food, shelter, clothing, and other resources to undocumented  
82 and documented immigrants.
- 83 6. Learn about issues affecting immigrants by reading newspapers or magazines, joining  
84 national immigration rights organizations, or contacting church agencies that work with  
85 immigration issues.

- 86 7. Join study tours to the U.S./Mexico border, refugee camps, or detention centers to learn more  
87 about U.S. immigration and refugee policies.  
88 8. Advocate for just and humane policies for immigrants and refugees by contacting local, state,  
89 and national elected officials.  
90

91 **These groups helped write and support this resolution:**

- 92 • Iglesia Menonita Hispana: Marco Guete, moderator; and Juan Montes, director
- 93 • MCC US: Jose Ortiz, executive director; Rebeca Jimenez Yoder, immigration education and  
94 advocacy director; Bethany Spicher, Washington Office legislative assistant for domestic  
95 affairs; Felipe Hinojosa, MCC Central States staff associate
- 96 • Executive Board Office of Cross Cultural Relations, Kenyetta Aduma, director
- 97 • Executive Board Directors Office, Susan Mark Landis, peace advocate
- 98 • Pacific Southwest Conference, Jeff Wright, conference minister, southern California
- 99 • PSMC/CAL Mission Team and the PSMC Pastoral Leadership Committee
- 100 • MultiEthnic Ministries, Mennonite Mission Network: Kuaying Teng, minister
- 101 • Mission Association Center for Anabaptist Leadership: Rev. Femi Fatunmbi
- 102 • Mennonite Church USA Executive Board Executive Board
- 103 • Mennonite Church USA Constituency Leaders Council

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105 **Resources:**

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107 **Mennonite Central Committee Immigration Office**

108 Offers two packets: “Welcoming the Newcomer: Doing Advocacy with Immigrants,” for general  
109 immigration information, and “Immigration Information Packet” about the basics of immigration law.  
110 Conducts periodic workshops on documentation, citizenship, the responsibilities of immigrant  
111 sponsors, the rights of battered immigrant women and children, and the rights of workers in  
112 employment raids. Contact Rebeca Jimenez Yoder, (717) 859-1151, rjy@mcc.org,  
113 <http://www.mcc.org/us/peaceandjustice/immigrat.html>  
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115 **Mennonite Central Committee Washington Office**

116 Offers a primer on immigration advocacy. Contact Bethany Spicher, (202) 544-6564,  
117 bspicher@mcc.org, <http://www.mcc.org/us/peaceandjustice/immigrat.html>  
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119 **Mennonite Central Committee Resource Catalog**

120 Includes various immigration-related videos with study guides, packets, and posters  
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122 **Mennonite Central Committee Web site**

123 “Love in Action” page includes suggestions for hands-on assistance, education, and advocacy  
124 <http://www.mcc.org/themes/us-immigration/index.html>  
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126 **New Bridges Immigrant Resource Center**

127 Hosts community immigration learning tours in Harrisonburg, Va. Contact Susannah Gerber Lepley,  
128 (540) 438-8295, newbridges1@aol.com  
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130 **BorderLinks**

131 A non-profit organization that conducts travel seminars focusing on the issues of Mexican border  
132 communities. Contact Katie Hudak, (520) 628-8263, Katie@borderlinks.org, www.borderlinks.org  
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134 **Third Way Café**

135 A collection of insightful interviews with a variety of immigrants and church workers who work with  
136 immigrants <http://www.thirdway.com/BTN/immigration/>

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138 **National Immigration Forum**

139 Advocates and builds public support for public policies that welcome immigrants and refugees.

140 Offers a series of short papers featuring useful statistical and historical information related to  
141 immigration. Visit [www.immigrationforum.org](http://www.immigrationforum.org)

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143 **National Immigration Law Center**

144 Specializes in immigration law, immigrant employment and public benefits rights of immigrants.

145 Provides publications, technical advice and trainings on immigration. Visit [www.nilc.org](http://www.nilc.org).

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