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**A Call for Comprehensive Immigration Reform
Resolution**

Financial Implications: None

MARCHA (Methodist Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic Americans)

"When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."

--Leviticus 19:33-34, NIV Bible Translation

Background:

As followers of Christ we are called to love the stranger in our midst because we were once strangers in a foreign land. We are all descendants of immigrants to this country. The stranger in the midst at one time or another has been your own family member.

In 1996 the Illegal Immigration Reform And Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) went into effect. This immigration law severely restricted the opportunities of immigrants in this country to reunite with their families and obtain permission to work legally and avoid being exploited by unscrupulous employers and employment practices. It restricted the opportunities for the elderly to obtain needed social services and for children to obtain an education at a reasonable cost. IIRAIRA also strengthened border security with the idea of reducing the numbers of people who enter this country every year without permission in search of opportunities to earn wages with which they can support their families back home. The law has not worked. The current immigration system is broken.

Approximately 850,000 immigrants enter the United States without permission every year. America benefits and prospers as a result of their labor; yet denies them basic rights like fair wages, health benefits, the opportunity to be with their families, and social services.

We are living in a time of persecution and oppression due to ignorance and fear. We hear reports of counties like Loudoun County and Prince William County in Virginia and cities like Hazelton, Pennsylvania, and Farmers Branch, Texas, pass resolutions and ordinances codifying the discrimination, persecution, and oppression of undocumented immigrants. There are new chapters of groups like the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps springing up all over the country. There is frustration on all sides about the state of our immigration laws. We must work to channel that frustration into advocacy for the passage of a comprehensive immigration reform bill.

Fear, ignorance and debate over immigration has generated dangerous racial dynamics that have led to racial profiling and intolerance toward Latino/Hispanic Cultures, an increase in the English-only language movements, and racism. The United Methodist Church has historically stood against racism, cultural prejudice, and other forms of intolerance. On the contrary, we as a church have affirmed and celebrated God's diverse human creation.

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As Christians and United Methodists we are called to love the stranger in our midst and to treat that stranger as we would our own family. We must be a church that welcomes the foreigners into our cities, our towns, our neighborhoods, our churches, our homes. We must keep ourselves open to the opportunity and blessing of entertaining angels unawares. If we are to truly live out our mandate of having open hearts, open minds, open doors, we must work to ensure the just treatment of the foreigners living among us. Therefore:

Be it resolved that the 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church assert that immigrants are children of God made in God's image; affirm the labor and struggle of the undocumented worker; and, assert that immigrant children deserve to be educated and provided with basic social services.

Be it further resolved that The United Methodist Church stands against all forms of oppressions and prejudices, and will work through its General Agencies, especially The General Commission on Religion and Race and the General Board of Church and Society, to resist racism, intolerance, and prejudice in the context of the immigration debate.

Be it further resolved that The General Conference urges all the local congregations to oppose unjust local and state ordinances that seek to deprive undocumented persons of basic social services including the access to adequate housing and protection under the law.

Be it further resolved that the 2008 General Conference join with M.A.R.C.H.A. (Methodists Associated to Represent the Cause of Hispanic/Latino Americans) and urge the United States Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that makes family unity, students being able to get an education at an affordable rate, fair and just treatment of laborers, and a reasonable path towards citizenship a priority.

Be it further resolved that the council of Bishops be asked to be sensitive to the immigration situation as it is important not only to demand this of the United States Government, but that they also improve policies inside the church that reflect this sensitivity on immigration.

Be it further resolved that the 2008 General Conference send a copy of this resolution and a letter to the President of the United States and the United States Congress urging them to work towards the passage of a fair and just comprehensive immigration bill.

Finally be it resolved that the 2008 General Conference of the United Methodist Church request the Council of Bishops to urgently establish a Plan of Action of Advocacy and Welcoming the Sojourner to enable their Annual Conferences to immediately respond to the needs and challenges of the Hispanic/Latino immigrant population, and all

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immigrant populations in the community by creating opportunities of service and equipping local churches to effectively respond in their ministry.

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