



## Religiously Diverse, United for Immigration Reform

Adopted January 29, 2014

We are religious leaders representing thirty traditions and more than two million constituents in the greater Philadelphia area; and WE ARE UNITED.

1. We are united by our awareness that immigration reform has long been a priority for leaders and citizens in the US; and we are united by our disappointment that so little reform has been achieved. The absence of reform insures the unfortunate continuation of policies and practices that prevent family unification, encourage racial profiling, and enable unequal treatment under the law.
2. We are united in our sense of urgency, believing immigration reform ought to be among the top priorities of legislators, and caring for immigrants ought to be among the top priorities of the faith community.
3. We are united in affirming that moral imperatives for reform are grounded both in the teachings of our various religious traditions and in the guiding principles of our nation.

In meetings, we have shared our own families' experiences as immigrants and listened to the stories of others. We have heard the analysis of national and local leaders seeking immigration reform. We have compared statements on immigration reform issued by 16 of the religious bodies we represent. We have prayed separately and together, and debated among ourselves. We agree with all who support insuring the security of our nation's borders as part of immigration reform. But, we are unanimous in our conviction that, even if consensus cannot be reached on how to secure our nation's borders, this nation must move forward with other reforms that:

- encourage documented immigration, promoting social and economic vibrancy for our nation;
- protect the human rights of immigrants and those detained, providing each one with access to due process under the law, including legal representation;
- promote compassionate treatment of families and enable family unification, especially for "mixed status" families; and
- provide a pathway to citizenship for those who are undocumented and already in the U.S.

We focus on these issues because our sacred texts insist that each person is made in the image of God and thus possesses dignity worthy of respect, regardless of that person's status in society. Our various traditions also are united in teaching that hospitality to strangers is God's will. For example, Leviticus 19: 33 – 34 in the Torah commands: "The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." In the Christian Testament, St. Paul directs Christians to, "extend hospitality to strangers" (Romans 12: 13); and Jesus teaches that whenever a stranger is welcomed into the community, he (Jesus) also has been welcomed (Matthew 25: 35 – 40). The Qur'an directs us to "serve God ... and do good to ... neighbors who are strangers" (4:36).

These teachings were incorporated into our nation's founding documents, especially the Declaration of Independence, drafted in Philadelphia, which proclaims that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are unalienable rights for all people. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution ensures "equal protection under the law," which the Supreme Court has interpreted to apply to citizens and non-citizens alike. Even before our nation was formed, William Penn, guided by his Quaker faith, envisioned our region as a place that would be open and welcoming to those seeking a new life regardless of their nationality, ethnicity or religious background. The practical wisdom of the moral imperatives from our sacred texts and our national ideals is proven by the historical experience of Philadelphia, and other cities and towns throughout the US: immigrants add economic and cultural vibrancy to their new homeland. They revitalize our neighborhoods, congregations, communities, and nation. Welcoming immigrants to our land is not only the right thing to do; it is a good thing to do for immigrants seeking a better life and for our country as it welcomes them.

Our religious teachings, our nation's ideals, and the history of immigrants' contributions to our communities lead us to call upon national, state and local elected officials and all in authority to address immigration reform *now* and make changes to public policy and practice that are just, compassionate, and humane.

With hope and prayer, we also call upon all communities of faith within our region to actively "welcome the stranger" and advocate for reform of the laws that govern immigration. We urge our constituents to offer financial support to faith-based and secular agencies which meet the needs of immigrants and to volunteer time and expertise to help immigrants adjust to life in their new communities. Specifically, we lift up for consideration the following opportunities for our houses of worship: to WELCOME immigrants and refugees, EDUCATE themselves about the immigrant experience and the laws which govern it, and ADVOCATE for reform locally, statewide, and nationally.

#### WELCOME

- Meet with immigrants and refugees to learn about their experiences before, during, and after their move to the US, in order to welcome the stranger **and** sensitize our communities to immigration issues.

- As a community, accompany at least one immigrant or refugee family through their next year of transitioning to life in the United States.
- Provide worship opportunities in immigrants' first languages or translation, and include prayers and preaching focused on immigration issues.
- Make sure immigrant neighbors are aware of the legal, social, and pastoral care services that are available to them through your house of worship or referrals you can make.
- Sponsor a campaign to provide household goods for immigrants in need.
- Hold events that will provide social and professional contacts for immigrants.

#### EDUCATE

- Become aware of our sacred texts' teachings regarding "welcoming the stranger." Discuss how your tradition has interpreted these teachings and put them into practice.
- Learn what immigration laws are in place now, and how they are applied.
- Learn about current efforts to enact immigration reform and how your denomination or tradition has responded to the issue.
- Sponsor a panel or discussion on immigration reform and invite the larger community to attend.

#### ADVOCATE

- Communicate with your representatives in congress and the senate, asking for immigration reform.
- Learn the position on immigration reform held by your representatives and schedule an in-district visit with them to discuss the issue.
- Monitor local and state legislators and encourage them to 1) pass legislation supportive of immigration reform and 2) oppose legislative proposals that discriminate against immigrants.
- Form or join a coalition that advocates for immigration reform in order to maximize the use of resources and make a stronger impact.

As religious leaders in the greater Philadelphia region, we dream of a day when people from all our traditions will unite to act on the teachings and values we hold in common. We look forward to becoming even more effective together than we are separately as we respond to the needs of our neighbors and help shape the future of our nation. As we unite to care for the immigrants and refugees among us and work on immigration reform together, our dream will be realized.

## Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia

### Co-Conveners:

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput - Archdiocese of Philadelphia  
Bishop Claire Schenot Burkat - Southeastern PA Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America  
Imam Anwar Muhaimin - Quba Masjid  
Rabbi David Straus - Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Phila.

### Members:

Rev. Luis A. Cortés, Jr. - Hispanic Clergy of Philadelphia & Vicinity  
Rev. Wanda D. Craner - PA Southeast Conference, United Church of Christ  
Bishop Clifton Daniel - Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania  
Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell - Delaware Valley Association of Reform Rabbis  
Dr. Bijan Etemad & Dr. Gity Etemad - Philadelphia Baha'i Community  
Rabbi Albert E. Gabbai - Congregation Mikveh Israel  
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Bishop Peter Hwang - Council of Korean Churches of Greater Philadelphia  
Bishop Gregory G.M. Ingram - African Methodist Episcopal Church  
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Bishop Peggy Johnson - Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, The United Methodist Church  
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Rev. Steven B. Lawrence - Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia  
Imam Muhammad Abdur-Razzaq Miller - Mosque of Shaikh M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen  
Father Mina Mina - St Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church  
Rev. James Poinsett - Presbytery of Philadelphia, Presbyterian Church USA  
Father Emmanuel Pratsinakis - Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey  
Imam Asim Abdur-Rashid - Majlis Ash-Shura of Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley  
Imam Mohamed Shehata - Al-Aqsa Islamic Society  
Elder Robert B. Smith - The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints  
Archbishop Stefan Soroka - Archeparchy of Philadelphia  
Rev. Dr. Richard Speck - Joseph Priestley District, Unitarian Universalist Association

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