

Position Statement of the Wesleyan Church

IMMIGRATION

Preamble

The Wesleyan Church is inspired by a God-given vision of equipping and empowering believers, leaders, and churches for “Fulfilling the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment.” Focused on this vision, our mission is to exalt Jesus Christ by . . .

- Evangelizing the lost;
- Discipling the believers;
- Equipping the Church; and
- Ministering to society.
- This vision and mission are nourished by “spiritual DNA” from The Wesleyan Church’s origins in historic Methodism and the American holiness and revival movements. We proudly claim our place among an earnest corps of disciples God is raising up to spread hope and holiness everywhere, proclaiming full salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Early strategies, from circuit-riding preachers, protracted meetings and camp meetings, to the Underground Railroad and the abolition of slavery, reveal the success of our forebears in balancing passionate evangelism and discipleship with godly concern for social reform. These have long since yielded to new ministry methods, necessitated by changing times and circumstances. Like our forebears, God calls us today to engage in promoting both personal holiness and social holiness. New issues of justice, compassion, and human need require us to respond boldly and wisely.
- Immigration is a contemporary issue that beckons Wesleyans to act as agents of Spirit-filled outreach and compassion in North American society. The United States and Canada are predominantly nations made up of immigrants and their descendants. Men, women, and their families seeking a better way of life, religious freedom, political asylum, opportunity to pursue great dreams and experience new beginnings have contributed to the prosperity and diversity that make our nations strong.
- According to the Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, as of January 1, 2006, there were 17.6 million legally resident immigrants and an estimated 11.6 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States. In 2006, U.S. Border Patrol and other agents located 1.2 million deportable aliens among the unauthorized population. Data from Statistics Canada based on 2006 census figures showed the proportion of the Canadian population born outside the country was at its highest ratio in

75 years—some 6.2 million foreign-born persons now represent 22.2 percent of Canada’s population (up from 18.4 percent just five years ago).

- Jesus said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” (Luke 12:48 NIV). God is blessing The Wesleyan Church in many ways to be a voice and force for the gospel among immigrant persons. We celebrate the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity of the North American Wesleyan family. We yearn for denominational demographics to reflect the cultural mosaic of American and Canadian society as a visible testimony of the success of our commitment to make disciples of all peoples. Ten years ago, 133 out of 1,671 Wesleyan congregations in the United States and Canada were self-identified as non-White. In 2007, 221 out of 1,691 churches were non-White—a 66 percent increase. By far, the fastest growing segment of the North American church in the last decade has been Hispanics and Latinos. Many of our newest Wesleyans are recent immigrants.

- We are grateful for the steady leadership of Wesleyan districts and local churches that are setting the pace for dynamic ministries of evangelism, church growth, church multiplication and ministries of compassion that include newcomers and strangers as our neighbors. Yet, we recognize there is much more that we can and must do as Christ’s messengers of hope and as examples of holy living.

- God is mindful of all people and concerned for their needs. Many immigrants face serious hardships—family separation and loneliness, financial distress, language barriers, exploitation, prejudice or racism, personal safety issues, social isolation, lack of food or shelter, problems adapting or assimilating into a new culture, insecurity and fear (especially for those who do not have proper documentation). More urgently, they are persons in need of the grace of God and the knowledge of Christ that leads to salvation. The Church as “the body of Christ” is the ongoing incarnation of His love and life. We represent Him when we give “cups of cold water in Jesus’ name” to persons who have fled countries of origin in which they suffered persecution, poverty, or political oppression. We model His compassion when we offer charity and hospitality to strangers He sovereignly brings to our shores to offer talents, skills, and labor that can contribute positively to our society. We are His servants when we aid newcomers and their families in dealing with the enormous challenges they face in assimilating into North American society—such as language learning, friendship building, finding medical care, making economic adjustments, and meeting legal requirements. While respecting those whom God has ordained to govern and protect society and submitting to their authority (so long as it does not violate the laws of God), we are the Lord’s voice to speak out prophetically against injustice and unrighteousness towards the weak. We must treat all persons with dignity, including those who have entered the country illegally or who entered legally but are now out of status with immigration authorities.

- The responsibility of the body of Christ to bear His message and to minister to all people rests in the hands of individual believers and congregations. As we wrestle with and respond to the challenges of immigration in our local communities and lands, we do so in full awareness that, as citizens of the kingdom of God, we ourselves are strangers and sojourners in the world in which we presently dwell. Therefore, Wesleyans everywhere are called to recognize and respond to the purposes of God among all peoples within their spheres of influence and to accomplish the redemptive and restorative purposes of Jesus Christ on their behalf. Trusting in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we embrace the following eight biblical principles to inform and guide The Wesleyan Church's response to immigration issues.

- Kingdom Values Regarding Christians and Immigration:
Eight Biblical Principles to Guide Wesleyan Responses

1. The Creation Principle: All persons are created equal and are of equal worth in their Creator's eyes. Each individual possesses fundamental rights to live and be respected as a human person of intrinsic worth and dignity. These rights are derived from one's creation in the image of God and from the vicarious death of Jesus Christ for all humanity.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:26-28 NIV).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28 NIV).

Action Step: Understanding that all are made in the image of God, as Wesleyans we will seek to treat all people humanely and with dignity, regardless of race, class, nationality, gender, or legal status.

2. The Great Commandment Principle: Christ commands us to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and our neighbors as ourselves. This commandment sums up the entire Law and the Prophets, requiring us to live in perfect love with God and our neighbor, which is holiness. We are to love our neighbor unconditionally regardless of race, class, nationality, or legal status in our land.

- 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40 NIV).

14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14 NIV).

22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23 NIV).

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40 NIV).

8Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love . . . 20If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen (1 John 4:8, 20 NIV).

15But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16 NIV).

- Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will give of ourselves in wholehearted love to others without intolerance, judgment, favoritism or disrespect, and in spite of who they are or what they have done to live among us.

- 3. The Sovereignty Principle: God is sovereignly at work to establish His kingdom in heaven and on earth. He determines the times and places where the peoples of the nations should live so that people will seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him. No one can ultimately succeed in thwarting God's work. God can bring good from the fallen intentions and actions of humanity and save many lives. Our responsibility as His people is to recognize His hand at work and cooperate with Him in ways that build up His kingdom in heaven and on earth.

- 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

28 "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring" (Acts 17:26-28 NIV).

9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" 11All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" (Revelation 7:9-12 NIV)

- All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35 NIV)

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20 NIV).

- Action Step: As Wesleyans, we view immigration as an aspect of God's larger plan to bring salvation to the world. Immigration can be used through God's wisdom to introduce many to Jesus who might not otherwise hear the gospel message.

- 4. The Submission Principle: Christians possess dual citizenship, one heavenly and the other earthly. Christians should respect and submit to the laws of the land, except when they are in contradiction to biblical principles. When there is a conflict between the heavenly and earthly citizenships as to specific claims, Christians have a moral duty and right to seek a change in the law and to act so as to maintain a clear conscience before God.

- 1Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor (Romans 13:1-7 NIV).

For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, "Go," and he goes; and that one, "Come," and he comes. I say to my servant, "Do this," and he does it (Matthew 8:9 NIV).

"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21 NIV).

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority (1 Peter 2:13 NIV).

16Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-18 NIV).

19But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. 20For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20 NIV).

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!" (Acts 5:29

NIV).

Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will exercise awareness of the laws as they pertain to immigration and will endeavor to obey them, and encourage all immigrants to do the same, unless these laws are contrary to God's Word as interpreted by the collective wisdom and authority of the body of Christ. We support the rights of those who engage in civil disobedience against harsh and unjust laws, policies and measures on the basis of biblical principles.

- 5. The Hospitality Principle: Christ's love compels us to be kind and compassionate and to offer hospitality, especially to those in need, including strangers, widows, orphans, aliens, and immigrants regardless of their legal status.

- 29But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 36"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" 37The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:29-37 NIV).

18He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. 19And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:18-19 NIV).

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 7:12 NIV).

And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward (Matthew 10:42 NIV).

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9 NIV).

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality (Romans 12:13 NIV).

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27 NIV).

- Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will encourage one another to engage in acts of kindness and compassion (i.e. providing food, shelter, clothing, and other resources) toward immigrants who are in need regardless of their immigration status (documented or undocumented).

6. The Great Commission Principle: Jesus Christ brings good news and has commissioned us to make disciples of all peoples, including citizens and aliens alike. We are called to follow His example and carry on His ministry, declaring good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, release to the oppressed, and the year of the Lord's favor.

- 18“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18-19 NIV).

19“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV).

1But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. 3The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” 11“No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:1-11 NIV).

37Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37-38 NIV).

- Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will unashamedly engage in both evangelizing and discipling immigrants in our communities, training and appointing immigrant persons as pastors, lay leaders, and workers, with respect for applicable employment laws as we do.

- 7. The Grace Principle: All have sinned and deserve God's judgment and punishment. Yet, He is a merciful God and seeks to reconcile us to Himself by grace. God's grace is a model for our own human relationships, compelling us to respond with grace to those who have sinned. We are called to seek reconciliation wherever possible, by standing against extreme and harsh measures and calling for appropriately balanced measures that restore one to a right relationship with God and with one's neighbors.

1Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.

But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2 NIV).

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16 NIV).

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30 NIV).

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7 NIV).

17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has

come! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,

not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of

reconciliation. 20We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21God

made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

(2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NIV).

35For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36I needed clothes and you

clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and

feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39When did we see you sick or in

prison and go to visit you?' 40"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' 41"Then he will say to

those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty

and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look

after me.' 44"Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45"Then he will reply,

'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal

life" (Matthew 25:35-46 NIV).

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Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will show God's grace by accepting those less fortunate than us. We will seek to have a welcoming heart to those that are strangers in our land, showing them acts of kindness and doing our part to understand other people's cultures to better serve them through God's love.

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8. The Justice Principle: God's people are called to seek justice for all persons proactively by calling for just, fair, reasonable, and humane laws and serving as advocates and defenders for those who are powerless, disenfranchised, and marginalized. Special attention ought to be given to protect the welfare of children and innocent dependents of

foreigners, regardless of their legal status.

33 When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. 34 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).

3 Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.

4 Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:3-4 NIV).

The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice (Ezekiel 22:29 NIV).

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8 NIV).

Action Step: As Wesleyans, we oppose and condemn all unjust and harsh laws, policies and measures directed against immigrants among us, whether documented or undocumented. We will act as advocates for just and humane policies for all people by all levels of government and in all parts of society.

- GENERAL CONFERENCE 2008
Ronald D. Kelly, Secretary