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The Vineyard and Undocumented Immigrants

Introduction

The churches that are part of the Vineyard Community of Churches, while a diverse group of churches, share the common core values of Kingdom theology and practice, culturally relevant mission, compassionate ministry, reconciling community and experiencing God. We underscore the fact that we are committed to offering extravagant, unconditional compassion and mercy to all people.

We believe these core values will serve us as we consider the complex question of undocumented immigrants in our congregations. While some pastors do not have to grapple with this question, many others do—most especially those leading congregations that are primarily Hispanic.

The question is also larger than some of us imagine and may become a future consideration if it is not one now. According to the Department of Homeland Security Office of Immigration Statistics, in early 2006 there were 17.6 million legally resident immigrants and an estimated 11.6 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States. Put another way, approximately one in twenty of us is undocumented. These kinds of numbers are raising questions about what are appropriate pastoral guidelines for undocumented Vineyard members and how should our pastors respond when these members continue on to become leaders and eventually desire to plant a new church? How should our pastors balance submitting to the government authorities (Romans 13:1) while showing hospitality to foreigners (Leviticus 18:33-34) and seeking justice for the poor, needy and alien (Ezekiel 22:29)? We believe our commitments to God's Kingdom and to God's heart of mercy offer guidance through these challenging questions.

While proposals to address the challenges of undocumented immigration are invariably controversial, we want to establish some principles that we hope seem non-controversial and align with Vineyard's commitment to scripture, the Kingdom of God and mercy. The following eight principles outlined are adapted from the Wesleyan Church's proposed "Position Statement on Immigration" and will hopefully provide for The Vineyard a helpful framework for addressing undocumented immigration. After considering these principles, we will suggest some concrete proposals for Vineyard churches.

Eight Principles to Consider

- 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.

²⁶Then 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. ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸God 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)

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

Therefore:

Understanding that all are made in the image of God, we will seek to treat all people humanely and with dignity, regardless of race, class, nationality, gender, legal status or any other distinctive.

2. **The Great Commandment Principle:** Christ commands us to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength 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, legal status in our land or any other distinctive.

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

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

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)

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)

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)

¹⁵*But 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)*

Therefore:

We will give of ourselves in wholehearted love to others without intolerance, judgment, favoritism or disrespect, irrespective 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 on earth even as it is in Heaven. 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 Kingdom at work and to be an instrument through which His Kingdom is manifested 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)*

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)*

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)

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)

Therefore:

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 in the Kingdom of God and the other in this world. 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 historically felt 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)

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)

"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)

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)

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷If 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)

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)

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

Therefore:

We will exercise awareness of the laws as they pertain to immigration and will endeavor to obey them, unless they are contrary to God's Word. As Christians, 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)

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)

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)

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)

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

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

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)

Therefore:

We will encourage one another to engage in acts of kindness and compassion (e.g., providing food, shelter, clothing, and other resources) toward immigrants who are in need regardless of their immigration status.

- 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)

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)

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)

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)

Therefore:

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)

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)

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)

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

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)

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?³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?³⁹ When 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.⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,⁴³ I 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 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 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)

Therefore:

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 peoples' cultures to better serve them through God's love.

- 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.

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)

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.* (Psalms 82:3-4)

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)

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)

Therefore:

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 and practices for all people by all levels of government and in all parts of society.

Some comments on undocumented immigrants

We recognize that perspectives within our movement widely vary about how to handle this issue from a public policy perspective. We also recognize that these principles do not address the moral questions regarding undocumented immigration. Some in The Vineyard would regard as immoral the choice to live in the U.S. without documentation. Others would have more sympathy for undocumented immigrants, pointing to the intolerable conditions they are fleeing at great personal risk and to the scant hope of obtaining work visas within a reasonable time frame. It is beyond the scope of this paper to suggest any legislative policy or provide arguments for or against the morality of the situation.

We believe that the above principles are in keeping with The Vineyard's core values, and as such are non-controversial. Our hope is that at the very least, regardless of our individual perspectives on the policy and morality questions, we can agree our Father dearly loves all people and all people are worthy of our love, care and assistance.