

Revised Statement on Immigration from Cimarron Presbytery

By the Justice and Reconciliation Committee, 04/30/2008

Throughout the history of our state and country, the immigration of various peoples has been a contentious issue.

On November 1, 2007, House Bill 1804 took effect in Oklahoma. The legislation is billed as the nation's toughest law against undocumented immigration, and Senate Bill 163, which contains an "English as the Official Language" amendment, has passed convincingly in the House and is on its way to the Senate.

Many members of Cimarron Presbytery, a governing body of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), are deeply concerned about the unresolved crisis over immigration in which we—as Christians—find ourselves. Efforts to resolve the situation politically have prompted us to state our views on the matter.

We do this for several reasons:

- to define who we are as Christians;
- to suggest ways to think about immigration that offer constructive alternatives to the current political impasse;
- to urge political decisions and actions that are universally constructive.

We speak out because God loves us in Jesus Christ and because this love is not only for us but is for the world; every single person is loved and sought after in love by God (John 3:16-17).

We speak out because we know that we have been guilty of sin in many of its pernicious manifestations—specifically, laziness, materialism, greed, and exploitation. These sins have led to and helped maintain the current immigration situation.

We speak out because we know that we are exiles, aliens and wanderers (Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 26:5; I Peter 1:1, 17; 2:11) and that our true home is not in this world (Philippians 3:20).

We speak out because we know that our Lord Jesus Christ has broken all the walls that separate us from God and each other (Ephesians 2:14ff); and we know that the walls that do exist are ones that we have created.

We speak out in the hope that our words reveal a way of thinking that will translate into action that manifests the Kingdom of God in the homes, relationships and communities of Cimarron Presbytery, the state of Oklahoma and all places where God's children live in hope and in need, in abundance and in fear.

We speak out because Jesus—filled with God’s spirit—taught: “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24). The prophet Isaiah, speaking of the future spirit-endowed ruler, said: “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth” (Isaiah 11:3-4).

Therefore:

- We promise to use carefully such words as alien, law, wall, etc., and to infuse them with the sense in which scripture employs them. We also affirm the gift of different languages, as each culture and tongue can contribute to our common life together.
- We do not recognize HB 1804 or SB 163 as expressions of the love of Christ or the will of God.

HB 1804 and SB 163 do not take into account the complexity of the immigration issue. These legislative actions cannot be reconciled with the Christian belief that all people are created in the image of God and are valued by God. Also, many of the values that define Oklahomans—such as our belief in the strength of the family and our dedication to neighborly hospitality—are strikingly absent in these bills.

- We commit our churches to be true sanctuaries for the souls and bodies of all of God’s children.

This is our thinking and this is our commitment. May God bless us with the wisdom and strength to live in ways where there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Galatians 3:28).

[End]

This statement—minus references to SB 163—was approved with minor changes by the General Council of Cimarron Presbytery on April 15, 2008. Insertion of references to SB 163, the quotations from John 7:24 and Isaiah 11:3-4, and the sentence affirming “the gift of different languages...to our common life together,” were added by a three-member subcommittee of the Justice and Reconciliation Committee after the Council had met.

The Justice and Reconciliation Committee will disseminate this statement to member churches in our presbytery, to Eastern Oklahoma and Indian Nations presbyteries, to the Executive of the Synod of the Sun, to the Oklahoma Conference of Churches, to the Manager for Immigration Issues of the General Assembly, PC (U.S.A.), and to newspapers and broadcasting stations serving, primarily, Oklahoma audiences.