



Ecumenical Declaration: Expand Welcome

Updated March 2021

Together with our joint membership of 37 Member Communion, we stand united in our resolve to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are committed to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God in fellowship with the vulnerable: the outcast, the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and all who are in need in our society.

We have, as faith partners, worked together throughout history to welcome refugees into our communities. Our congregations have been a bedrock of support for this demonstration of solidarity and compassion to people around the world. We have seen how refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants make our communities more vibrant, prosperous, and secure. We hereby pledge to do everything in our power to restore and maintain hospitality and welcome to all people — regardless of where they are from, how they pray, or what language they speak. We commit to restoring American leadership to address the global displacement crisis.

We are in a critical moment that calls us to hold our leaders accountable to the moral responsibility of turning the principles of mercy and justice into concrete action. The world faces unprecedented displacement. War, conflict, and persecution have forced millions to leave their homes, creating more refugees than at any other time in history. There are [79.5 million displaced persons worldwide](#), including more than 29 million refugees, over half of whom are children. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [reports](#) that global resettlement needs have doubled in recent years reaching over 1.44 million refugees in 2020.

We grieve for the families who have experienced and continue to experience family separation because of impractical immigration policies, for the refugee families that await the day they can reunite, and for the countless asylum seekers who were expelled from the U.S. without a proper opportunity to claim asylum. The previous administration's attempt to dismantle refugee resettlement and asylum commitments has undermined the capacity, expertise and opportunity of our communities of faith to exercise our spiritual practice of welcoming the stranger.

We are committed, however, to being a beacon of hope in this new era, welcoming and accompanying immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees with renewed vigor. We recognize that our collective response needs to be powerful and intentional in order to unpack and address the causes of forced migration. It is imperative that we understand the domestic immigration situation as a manifestation of the larger global migration phenomena. We further acknowledge that we must be vigilant to the political forces that for good or bad shape the immigration policies of this country.

The previous administration dismantled the resettlement of refugees in the U.S. by more than 80%, setting consecutively historic-low refugee admissions goals, including an FY 2021 admissions goal of only 15,000. At the same time, the previous administration turned away asylum seekers and infamously separated parents and children seeking safety at our borders.

The Biden administration issued an executive order in February 2021, signaling the administration's promise to restore and rebuild the life-saving program and committing to raising the refugee admissions goal to 125,000 for Fiscal Year 2022 with a revised refugee admissions goal of 62,500 for FY 2021 -- an important step toward returning the resettlement program to historic norms. While we are encouraged by the administration's recent consultations with Congress regarding this proposal, **we are deeply concerned that the FY21 Presidential Determination has not yet been signed and urge the President to immediately sign a new, revised FY21 PD.** As members of the faith community, we pledge to hold the administration accountable to honor its commitment to protect refugee families, and reverse the damage done to the refugee resettlement program under the previous administration.

The Biden administration signed additional executive orders to begin reversing the anti-asylum, anti-immigrant policies by the previous administration -- claiming bold leadership in welcoming immigrant families and asylum seekers by establishing a family reunification task force, dismantling the harmful Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) program, ending the family-immigration ban, and reviewing the discriminatory public charge rule.

We urge the Biden administration to go further and take steps to reverse all anti-asylum policies, including by ending Title 42 expulsions and suspending deportation flights that endanger the lives of migrants—in particular, Black migrants who may have been denied a proper opportunity to seek asylum and would experience extreme hardship if they were to return—as well as ending overreliance on immigrant detention and expanding humane alternatives. The moral way forward is for the Biden administration to fully restore U.S. asylum policies by allowing all people to present themselves for asylum with safely-implemented COVID-19 practices and testing where necessary.

We claim as sacred truth the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:35, “For I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” We recognize the face of Christ in the migrant and the refugee. In that spirit, we hereby:

1. Request a meeting with President Biden and relevant government officials to urge our government leaders to immediately revise the FY 2021 refugee admissions goal, fulfill a minimum annual commitment for 125,000 refugee admissions in FY 2022, and invest in rebuilding the overseas and domestic infrastructure that helps our communities assist refugees in the U.S. and abroad. We implore the administration to lead by example in fulfilling these commitments.
2. Call on Members of Congress to do everything in their power to hold the administration accountable to fulfill its promise to end all anti-refugee, anti-asylum, anti-immigrant policies and restore and strengthen refugee and asylum protections. Such policies include ending Title 42 expulsions, immigrant detention, deportations, family separation, criminal prosecutions for migration offenses, and the militarization of border communities - as well as redressing prior harms caused by harmful and immoral policies, such as for individuals who had been subject to the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), turnbacks, or family separation.
3. Urge Members of Congress to pass inclusive immigration reforms that push back against criminalization of immigrants, create a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented people, and support community-based alternatives to detention.
4. Encourage our communions to organize and facilitate meetings with local, state, and national policy makers to educate them about our solidarity with refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants and urge them to support policies that affirm a welcome to the sojourner.
5. Commit to resourcing, supporting, and standing with our congregations who organize public, prayerful demonstrations of welcome for refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.
6. Commit to supporting refugees who have already arrived in the United States, those who will arrive in the months to come, and to the important work of rebuilding the capacity of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.
7. Commit to work for the dedication of one Sunday in 2021 in the life of our communions to engage all of our congregations in honoring refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants' journeys, reminding our congregations of the biblical call to welcome refugees and immigrants, and inviting our congregation members to take public action in support of refugees, asylum seekers and other immigrants.
8. Commit to working together to accompany asylum-seekers and immigrants as they navigate justice in our U.S. immigration system.

Through this Ecumenical Declaration, we pledge to **Expand Welcome** by engaging our congregations and networks in safeguarding refugee protection in the United States and beyond, and by being a bold, prophetic voice in solidarity with immigrants and refugees.

It is our resolve as an ecumenical body to share information about this **Ecumenical Declaration to Expand Welcome**, its goals, and reason for being, through our mainline and social media outlets. We pledge to invite all our constituents and all other people of faith to join us in this effort, “to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke” (Isaiah 58:6)

“Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 John 3:18).

In Christ’s name,

Rick Santos, President & CEO, Church World Service

[below are tentative signatures, we hope to be re-affirmed]

Jim Winkler, President & General Secretary, National Council of Churches USA
Reverend Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Bishop John F. White, President, Council of Bishops, African Methodist Episcopal Church
The Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ
Rev. Teresa (Terri) Hord Owens, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Bishop Kenneth H. Carter, President of the Council of Bishops, The United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Thomas DeVries, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America
The Rev. Eddy M. Alemán, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America
The Right Reverend George E. Battle, Jr., Senior Bishop of The AME Zion Church Rev. Jane Siebert,
President of the Swedenborgian Church, United States and Canada
Reverend Dr. James C. Perkins, President, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
His Eminence Vicken Aykazian, Archbishop, Armenia Orthodox Church
The Reverend Jeffrey Haggray, Executive Director, American Baptist Home Mission Societies
Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey, Director of Partnership Relations, Alliance of Baptists
Bishop Lawrence Reddick, Senior Bishop, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
The Most Rev. Michael Bruce Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church
Colin Saxton, General Secretary of Friends United Meeting
The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Christie Duncan-Tessner, General Secretary, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
The Rev. Dr. Elizabeth D. Miller, President, Provincial Elders’ Conference, Moravian Church Northern Province
Francis Krebs, Presiding Bishop of The Ecumenical Catholic Communion