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The United Church of Christ, an Immigration Welcoming Church, puts faith in action at Immigration Justice Rally

BALTIMORE (July 4, 2017)— A day after the 31st General Synod of the United Church of Christ declared the denomination an “Immigrant Welcoming Church,” members put those words in action, rallying in support of an Annapolis, Md., artist and grandfather, who was seized outside his home on his way to work and detained the past three months by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents.

Nearly 300 people, chanting in English and Spanish, marched a few blocks from the Baltimore Convention Center to Hopkins Place and the Baltimore ICE office, urging the agency’s chief counsel to reopen the case of Guillermo Recinos Morales so that he can apply for asylum and remain with his family in Annapolis.

The rally, organized by the UCC National Immigration Collaborative, in partnership with the CASA, the UCC’s Central Atlantic Conference, United Black Christians, Latinx Ministries and Annapolis Sanctuary Network, drew advocates from around the country.

The immigration resolution, which was approved on July 2 by 96 percent of voting delegates, calls on its churches to become active “Immigrant Welcoming Congregations” and to claim that name for themselves. It also urges the U.S. government to develop policies dedicated to “facilitating the respectful welcome and inclusion of all immigrants.” Since 1995, UCC General Synods, the denomination’s biennial governance meeting, have repeatedly called for a fair and humane approach to U.S. immigration policy.

The Rev. John Dorhauer, the UCC’s general minister and president, recalled the story of Moses and told the rally, “We are now on sacred ground made holy by the tears of this family, grieving for their father imprisoned now by the new Pharaoh. Take up the mantle of leadership and find your courage. Go to the Pharaoh and demand, ‘Let my people go!’”

The Rev. Traci Blackmon, the denomination's executive for justice and witness ministries, said, "Scripture says, 'When a stranger resides in your land, you shall not oppress the stranger. The stranger who resides with you shall be with you as a citizen among you.'"

"There's a whole lot of talk about religion on the right and religion on the left," she added. "Let me tell you my friends, there is nothing right about a religion that deports citizens of the United States. There is nothing right about a religion that deports immigrants who only came here for a better life for their family. There is nothing right about religion that calls into question those who come here and contribute to this society, work hard to raise their families and want nothing more than what we want for our own families."

"This is our country and we must demand better of our government," she added. "If we don't do it, then we are not the America we say we are. We must rise. We must resist. We must repent. Not just for Guillermo, but for the sake of our own souls."

Speaking in English and Spanish, the Rev. Justo Gonzalez II of Pilgrim-St. Lukes and El Nuevo Camino UCC in Buffalo, N.Y., told the crowd, "It is totally unacceptable that you separate parents from their children. And when you get the church angry, we decide to get our hands dirty, we decide to get involved. We walk the streets, we preach the Gospel, not only on Sunday, but we demand justice on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday . . . and we fight for the dignity and rights of all people." Gonzalez said his church has already helped 31 adults and 11 children who have sought sanctuary and assistance in obtaining asylum in Canada."

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About the United Church of Christ The United Church of Christ is a mainline Protestant denomination comprised of nearly 900,000 members and 5,000 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly-gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

The UCC and its members are tireless advocates for social issues such as immigration reform, racial equality, LGBT rights, marriage equality, environmental protection and economic justice.