

The Business Committee of the Thirty-Second General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent to a Committee of the General Synod.

**ADDRESSING THE STATE OF GLOBAL FORCED MIGRATION**

**A Resolution of Witness**

**Submitted by the United Church of Christ Board**

**SUMMARY:**

This resolution draws the church’s attention to the broad scope of unprecedented and massive displacement worldwide, including the variety of causes, the impact on human beings, and the responses of partners in the US and around the world, along with underlying attitudes of racism, xenophobia, and bigotry in the debates and discourse. It calls the United Church of Christ to continue to pray and learn about the current state of global migration, to take actions related to US policy, and to support global and domestic partners engaged in response; and it affirms our rejection of attitudes, discourse, and actions that discriminate based on any aspect of identity.

**BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, and HISTORICAL GROUNDING:**

Migration, displacement, and exile have been present throughout human history, including in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Some biblical examples include God’s call of Abram to leave Ur; Joseph’s brothers’ venture to Egypt to buy grain because of famine in Canaan; Exodus as a story of escape across borders; Noah and the threat of climate change; the Babylonian exile; and the Holy Family’s escape to safety soon after the birth of Jesus because of King Herod’s edict that all first-born male children under two born in the Bethlehem area be killed.

Jesus teaches us that the two greatest commandments are to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31). When Jesus spoke of the judgment, he taught the reality of the realm of God by saying “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’... ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it unto me” (Matthew 25:35-36, 40). The author of the letter to the Hebrews goes on to remind the faithful “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2). James warns against the sin of partiality that gives preference to those with resources over those without access. (James 2:9).

In our day, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in a 2017 report, estimates that more than 68.5 million people are forcibly displaced from their homes, including more than 5 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). This massive displacement is the largest in recorded history, and there is no sign of a reversal of the trend. While almost two-thirds of those displaced remain within their own countries, most cannot return home. The UNHCR report cites war, violence, and

42 persecution as significant causes. Additional factors for global forced migration include climate  
43 change, drought and famine, and impoverishment, among others.

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45 The overwhelming majority of those who have been forcibly displaced outside their home  
46 countries currently reside in poorer, developing countries, barely able to provide services for  
47 their own populations, let alone influxes of new arrivals. Countries and systems increasingly  
48 restrict the movement of people, denying them respite and dignity. The global community needs  
49 to be engaged in creating and strengthening international systems to better accommodate this  
50 phenomenon so that the responsibilities, and the opportunities, of caring for humanity are shared.

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52 Among economically developed countries, contemporary policy debates around immigration  
53 policies in the United States and Europe in particular, with few exceptions, have centered on  
54 stereotypes and fear, suggesting that newcomers would be “criminals and rapists,” violent  
55 terrorists, usurpers of public wealth and job opportunities. Efforts, including presidential  
56 executive orders, have been made to disallow people from coming to the US based on their  
57 countries of origin and their religion. Children have been separated from their families, with  
58 long-term impact on their mental health a result. This is a not-so-subtle message that brown and  
59 black people, and Muslims, in particular, are not welcome, and a clear effort to preserve the  
60 privilege of some at the expense of many.

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62 The United Church of Christ and its affiliated and predecessor bodies have been working with  
63 refugees for over a century, and have adopted policies at General Synod that speak to particular  
64 aspects of refugees and immigration before (1967, 1981, 1985, 1989, 1995, 2009, 2013, and  
65 2017, to name several). It has also proclaimed and reaffirmed itself a Just Peace Church, and has  
66 denounced racism and discrimination in all their forms. With this resolution, the UCC  
67 recognizes the global scale of the issue, the human impact, the variety of causes, the responses of  
68 many of our global partners, and the abhorrence of racism, xenophobia, and bigotry that underlie  
69 barriers to addressing the matter with a sense of justice.

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71 **TEXT OF THE MOTION:**

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73 **WHEREAS**, the global state of forced migration and displacement has reached a crisis,  
74 according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, with currently more than 68.5  
75 million people forcibly displaced from their homes for reasons of war, violence, persecution,  
76 climate change, economic injustice, impoverishment, colonialism and its legacy, and  
77 exploitation, among others, a trend that continues to increase with no sign of a reversal (2017  
78 UNHCR report); and

79  
80 **WHEREAS**, more than 85% of those who are displaced are currently in countries that have little  
81 economic or structural capacity to provide care or services for them, while those nations who are  
82 far better able to do so, including the United States, have (for the most part) placed restrictions  
83 on refugee admissions, asylum applications and other forms of immigration, even while  
84 benefitting economically from the impoverished and unstable countries from which many of  
85 these displaced persons flee; and

86

87 **WHEREAS**, policy debates and general discourse on migration in the United States and in  
88 Europe have, with a few notable exceptions, centered on justifications of restrictions that are  
89 racist, xenophobic, bigoted, and slanderous, and have specifically named people who are brown  
90 and black, from specific countries, and of certain faiths, particularly Islam, as excluded; and  
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92 **WHEREAS**, those countries that do host refugees and migrants often receive compensation  
93 from the US and Europe to keep the migrants “warehoused” in their countries; and  
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95 **WHEREAS**, thus far, the global community has failed terribly to address comprehensively and  
96 collaboratively the massive movement of people, most often for reasons of self-interest,  
97 preservation of privilege, power, and wealth, enabling wealthy economies to benefit from the  
98 labor of migrants with little acknowledgement of obligations for the security and welfare of the  
99 migrants themselves; and  
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101 **WHEREAS**, due to restrictions and strict regulations, people take tremendous risks to reach  
102 safety and a new home, crossing deserts, seas, and other difficult terrain, for days, weeks, and  
103 months, only to reach reinforced and militarized borders, detention, and incarceration, likely  
104 rejection and forced return; not to mention the thousands who do not survive the journey at all;  
105 and  
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107 **WHEREAS**, the United Church of Christ has a long history of providing welcome and creating  
108 robust structures of welcome for the resettlement of refugees within the United States; and  
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110 **WHEREAS**, global partners of the United Church of Christ are advocating for and responding  
111 to the needs of the displaced and refugees among them, often with our support through Global  
112 Ministries, One Great Hour of Sharing, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)’s Week of  
113 Compassion offering, including:  
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- 115 ○ People fleeing from high levels of structural, social and economic violence in El  
116 Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and other countries in Latin America and the  
117 Caribbean, and seeking asylum elsewhere to escape horrific conditions;
- 118 ○ African migrants and refugees who have become bottle-necked in North Africa, including  
119 in Morocco, in their attempt to make their way to Europe;
- 120 ○ Refugees from conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, now living  
121 in camps in Tanzania;
- 122 ○ Syrian and Iraqi displaced persons and refugees who have escaped war and conflict, now  
123 located throughout the Middle East and in Europe;
- 124 ○ Generations of Palestinian refugees displaced and dispossessed of their homes and  
125 property following the wars of 1948 and 1967, in the Middle East and beyond;
- 126 ○ People from throughout Southern Asia where millions are forced to migrate, and are  
127 trafficked and pushed into various forms of slavery;
- 128 ○ People at risk from climate change in the Pacific Islands, including Tuvalu, where rising  
129 sea levels threaten to flood and eventually eliminate whole island countries;
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131 **WHEREAS**, General Synods of the United Church of Christ have advocated for a more humane  
132 US immigration policy (GS 2007), comprehensive immigration reform (GS 2013), and for the

133 UCC to become an immigrant welcoming church (GS 2017); and, with the guidance of our  
134 global partners through Global Ministries, advocate for the rights and dignity of displaced persons  
135 and migrants the world over;

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137 **BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED**, that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the United  
138 Church of Christ:

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140 *Affirms* a vision of God’s family that is all-inclusive, accepting, and welcoming, recognizing the  
141 dignity of every human being; and *rejects* the divisive discourse of fear, xenophobia, bigotry,  
142 and racism that pervades the discourse on global forced migration, including as it relates to  
143 policy debates on immigration; and

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145 *Calls* upon the members of the United Church of Christ to take the matter of global forced  
146 migration seriously, to pray and learn about the current state of global forced migration using  
147 resources made available through the church, specifically Global Ministries, the UCC’s  
148 Humanitarian and Development Ministries, and the UCC National Collaborative on  
149 Immigration; and

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151 *Urges* members of the UCC to participate in practicable ways to address the state of global  
152 forced migration through

- 153 ○ support of denominational partners around the world who are responding to the needs of  
154 displaced people, whether they are refugees, migrants, internally displaced, asylum-  
155 seekers, or others, through Global Ministries and One Great Hour of Sharing;
- 156 ○ engagement in refugee resettlement programs in the US through the UCC’s Humanitarian  
157 and Development Ministries;
- 158 ○ advocacy for the rights of refugees everywhere based on the Convention Relating to the  
159 Status of Refugees (1951); and for Palestinian refugees specifically as stipulated in UN  
160 General Assembly Resolution 194 (1948), and for continued US funding for the United  
161 Nations Relief and Works Agency;
- 162 ○ advocacy and action on issues of economic justice, climate justice, and immigration  
163 justice; and
- 164 ○ efforts to dismantle racism, to learn about different cultures and religions, including  
165 Islam, and to counter any form of discrimination, bigotry, and xenophobia when  
166 encountered; and

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168 *Calls* upon the US Administration and Congress to take the issue of global forced migration  
169 seriously, leaving behind partisan discourse and promoting actively the principles of the United  
170 Nations’ Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, which seeks, among other  
171 things, to:

- 172 ○ address all aspects of international migration, including the humanitarian, developmental,  
173 human rights-related and other aspects;
- 174 ○ make an important contribution to global governance and enhance coordination on  
175 international migration;
- 176 ○ present a framework for comprehensive international cooperation on migrants and human  
177 mobility; and

178           ○ set out a range of actionable commitments, means of implementation and a framework  
179           for follow-up and review among Member States regarding international migration in all  
180           its dimensions,

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182 and *Calls* UCC members and settings to *advocate* for the US to work with the global community  
183 toward these goals.

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185 **FUNDING:**

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187 The funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the  
188 overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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190 **IMPLEMENTATION:**

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192 The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within  
193 the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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195 *References:*

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197 “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017,” published by UNHCR,

198 <http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2017/>

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200 The UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, [https://www.iom.int/global-](https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration)  
201 [compact-migration](https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration).