



130 East Washington Street
Indianapolis, Indiana
46204



Global Ministries



Dear Members of Congress,

June 23, 2014

As a faith movement founded on the American frontier, and with several founders who were themselves adult immigrants, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has throughout its heritage valued the contributions of immigrants. Since the 1950's, we have assisted in the resettlement of nearly 40,000 refugees. We were among the originating denominations decades ago with the National Farm Worker Ministry, and continue to work to ensure fair wages and work conditions for farm workers who grow our food. As a church, and with particular intensity among our Disciples Women network of hundreds of thousands across the U.S., we remain committed to breaking the chains that bind women, children, and men in conditions of human trafficking. Additionally, we have worked consistently to support human rights and dignity among immigrant populations, asylees, and other vulnerable populations. Such commitments are key values within our faith family—especially as we recognize that churches of multi-ethnic (often immigrant) populations make up nearly two-thirds of our new churches. Our Biblical command that *“the foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born”* (Leviticus 19:34) undergirds all our actions, and we remain committed with you to seek visionary solutions to our broken immigration system.

At this time, we are particularly concerned about the needs of unprecedented numbers of unaccompanied migrant children arriving into the U.S. Our Global Ministries around the world inform our commitment to improve root causes of gang violence, human trafficking, extreme poverty, armed conflict, gender-based and domestic violence, and desires for family reunification which exacerbate the decisions for children and family members to flee their homelands. We are well aware that most of those arriving into the United States come from the Central American countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras where such conditions are particularly acute. We are likewise aware that an alarming number of those who are arriving are girls traveling alone, due to increased gender-based violence in their home countries. We call now upon Congress to conduct an analysis of root causes of this humanitarian crisis, and to explore how U.S. foreign and trade policies impact the region. Perspectives of faith, NGO, and civil organizations serving vulnerable populations should be included in this analysis.

Additionally, we recommend policies within the U.S. House which will:

- provide emergency funds to address this large-scale humanitarian crisis;
- provide legal assistance and representation for all unaccompanied migrant children;
- require children released from federal custody receive follow up services to ensure their safety and well being;
- improve the trafficking screening, training and protocols along the border so that children entering the U.S. are properly evaluated and that victims of trafficking and persecution are effectively identified and referred for appropriate services;
- provide safe and humane living conditions, medical care and mental health support without delay;
- place children as quickly as possible with their family members in the U.S. and/or into qualified community-based care, therapeutic placements, mentor homes, and foster homes—especially for young children and pregnant and parenting teens;
- ensure accurate investigation of Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) abuse and allow independent human rights monitoring;
- collaborate creatively with the faith community, NGOs, the UNHCR, and others concerned about these children;
- provide access to visitation ministries, pastoral care, play and other activities appropriate for children

As a faith community, we promise to continue to inform our faith family of the needs of these vulnerable children and their families, and to encourage their personal and community engagement in offering their hearts, hands, and voices to support them. We will remain in dialogue with our faith partners to strengthen the healing impact of our church, and will pray for you—our legislative leaders—in your own discussions as you make choices to act with compassion and wisdom.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church, Disciples of Christ
 The Rev. Dr. Ronald Degges, President, Disciples Home Missions
 The Rev. Dr. Patricia Donahoo, Executive Director, Disciples Women
 The Rev. Julia Brown Karimu, Co-Exec. Global Ministries, President, Division of Overseas Ministries
 The Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Director, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries