

# The Episcopal Church and Migration Issues

## A core value: Migration with Dignity

As Episcopalians, we are called upon to affirm Migration with Dignity as a framework to guide ministry with migrants, making urgent efforts to support arriving migrants' immediate needs for shelter, food, clothing, legal assistance, work permits, healthcare, transportation, etc. We are also urged to advocate for Migration with Dignity to local, state, national, and international governing bodies, exhorting them to enforce existing laws and policies that uphold these principles and to enact new laws and policies guaranteeing migrants' welcome, protection, and integration into our common human journey.

At the Diocesan Convention in January 2024 and later, at the 81st General Convention in June 2024, the Church adopted a resolution calling for Migration with Dignity, "a statement of specific principles about migration that resonate with the teachings of Jesus and our baptismal promise to 'respect the dignity of every human being.'" This set of principles addresses the challenges of global migration in a new way while aligning with the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international laws and agreements and is consistent with previous resolutions of General Convention.<sup>1</sup>

The resolution foresees replacing the punitive immigration policies currently enforced in the U.S. and many parts of the world with frameworks that respect six specific types of human rights:

- A universal right of movement, including freedom to leave and return to one's country of origin, freedom of movement within one's country of origin or country of settlement
- The right to be secure: from sexual violence including rape and sexual exploitation, human trafficking, slavery, forced labor, and arbitrary and abusive detention
- The right of equality, to include: 1) equal treatment with no discrimination under the law based on color, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political affiliation, national origin; and 2) equal opportunity for upward mobility
- Rights to a basic quality of life, including employment rights, housing rights, and food rights
- The right to access services such as health care, education, and legal representation
- Civil and political rights guaranteeing the right to identity, to use of one's language, and to freedom of speech and religion

## A history of engagement and activism

The Episcopal Church has a long history of engaging with and seeking to protect the rights of immigrants and refugees. Relevant TEC resolutions available online date back to 1979, when the 66<sup>th</sup> General Convention commended the Church for resettling 2,300 refugees and urged Episcopal churches to express "in word and deed" the "sustaining love of Jesus Christ to today's pilgrim peoples."<sup>2</sup> In 1982, the 67<sup>th</sup> General Convention adopted Resolution 1982-A063 supporting policies and legislation welcoming immigrants and refugees regardless of "race, religion, geography, nationality, sexual orientation or language" and calling for the cessation of "inhuman treatment accorded in recent years to refugees from Haiti and El Salvador."<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1980s, successive General Conventions have adopted resolutions supporting immigration reform and calling for the granting of permanent residency to those with temporary protected status. The 79<sup>th</sup> Convention (2018) saw half a dozen resolutions adopted on migration-related issues, including one setting forth principles to guide the Episcopal

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph and the details of the Migration with Dignity resolution are from the factsheet, "What is 'Migration with Dignity,'" prepared by the Episcopal Migration Caucus.

<sup>2</sup> General Convention, Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Denver, 1979 (New York: General Convention, 1980), p. C-103.

<sup>3</sup> General Convention, Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, New Orleans, 1982 (New York: General Convention, 1983), p. C-131.

Church's response to migration.<sup>4</sup> While this resolution recognizes the “legitimate need to protect borders and address security threats to sovereign nations,” it calls on governments to “keep their commitments and legal obligations to respect the rights and dignity of all people, including access to justice and social services.”

Beyond words on paper, The Episcopal Church has acted through its Episcopal Migration Ministries to support the resettling of some 100,000 refugees over a period of 40 years, building on a legacy of support for people fleeing persecution and oppression that dates to the late 1800s.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Church's Office of Government Relations (OGR) uses the policy positions of the Church to advocate with Congress and the Executive Branch on immigration and refugee issues. OGR regularly issues public policy action alerts on immigration-related issues and maintains a list of available resources on US policies related to immigration and refugees, including positions of The Episcopal Church, [here](#).<sup>6</sup> Episcopal churches have also been active in the Sanctuary Movement, seeking to provide pastoral and other support to our sisters and brothers in the immigrant community.

### Speaking out: Dignity, not Mass Deportation

In late 2024, the Episcopal Migration Caucus—an advocacy group comprising clergy and laity—developed a statement titled, “[Dignity, not Mass Deportation](#)” that notes the importance of opposing and preparing for the kinds of mass deportations threatened by the incoming administration. This statement encourages churches to use the season of Epiphany to engage with their congregations on Migration with Dignity. Resources, including collects, prayers, talking points, and preaching notes, are available by emailing [episcopalmigrationcaucus@gmail.com](mailto:episcopalmigrationcaucus@gmail.com).

Most recently, Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde delivered a powerful homily at the Service of Prayer for the Nation, held on January 21, 2025, following the inauguration of President Donald Trump, in which she called upon the new president to show mercy to immigrants.



*“Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land.”*

—Bishop Mariann Budde  
Episcopal Diocese of Washington  
January 21, 2025

### Living out Jesus's teaching: Love one another

As people of faith, we are called to live out Jesus's teaching to love one another—no exceptions—and this includes welcoming and protecting the stranger. In so doing, we are exercising our First Amendment right to freedom of religion.

### Because the Bible tells us so: Key passages on welcoming the stranger

- “Don't mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat them as well as you treat citizens and love them as much as you love yourself. Remember, you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt...” (Leviticus 19:33-34)
- “You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:19)
- “...I was a stranger, and you welcomed me....” (Matthew 25:35)
- “Be sure to welcome strangers into your home. By doing this, some people have welcomed angels as guests, without even knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2)
- “Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” (1 Peter 4:8-10)

<sup>4</sup> General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Austin, 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), pp. 1065-1067.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://episcopalmigrationministries.org/our-history>; last accessed December 28, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/office-government-relations/migration-refugees-immigration>.