

BORDER JUSTICE ISSUES: A CHALLENGE FOR THE 21 CENTURY CHURCH
A Resolution Adopted by General Synod XXII of the United Church of Christ (1999)

WHEREAS, the people of the United States and Mexico share a common border that runs some 2000 miles and where they are deeply intertwined in a unique common multiracial, multilingual culture, economy, and geography;

WHEREAS, the concept of a political border meant to exclude one group from another, sometimes in the most oppressive manner, runs counter to biblical teachings, including the Hebrew Bible, the imperative of Jesus in his warning "for I was a stranger and you welcomed me" and the urging of Paul to break down the walls between us;

WHEREAS, the history of the people who have had the courage to cross that "boundary" line is rich in tradition and contributions made to the growth and development of the United States, in our economic sphere, as well as in the areas of leadership, education, quality of life and when their sons and daughters have made the supreme sacrifice;

WHEREAS, the economics of globalization has led to exploitive labor practices, environmental degradation, human rights abuses and inadequate social infrastructure along the U.S. - Mexico border;

WHEREAS, organized labor and the corporate sector must continue to be prepared to assist in the development of a skilled and competitive workforce and the search for world markets must be compatible with those values of an equitable and humane concern for the workers and the country that has given them the capacity they now enjoy in the global marketplace;

WHEREAS, examples of economic, social, and racial injustice exist in the many *colonias* - communities without water or electric utilities, environmental safeguards, schools, healthcare, or other social services - that have sprung up in the many twin cities along the U.S. - Mexico border;

WHEREAS, there has been historical exploitation of Mexican workers in the form of migrant farm labor, a livelihood that has been designated by the U.S. Department of Labor as the most dangerous in the United States;

WHEREAS, the U.S. - Mexico border is an environmental calamity in progress with mounting instances of hazardous landfills and illegal disposal of chemical wastes, unsafe working conditions resulting in exposure of workers, serious cases of air pollution, and - in many cases - the virtual nonexistence of any environmental safeguards;

WHEREAS, there are increasing instances of harassment of documented or undocumented Mexicans and Mexican Americans crossing the border, including the building of three fences between the two nations, as well as illegal and unjust searches and detention;

WHEREAS, Latino/Latina/Hispanic persons from many nations, including the United States, are being harassed by law enforcement and other officials not only along the border, but also hundreds and even thousands of miles away from the actual border;

WHEREAS, there exist indigenous nations whose sovereign lands are divided by the building of fences on the politically-imposed U.S. - Mexico border which disrupt sacred practices;

WHEREAS, the National Council of Churches conducted a Border Justice Hearing in 1994 at El Paso, Texas, ; the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ held its 1998 Annual Board

Meeting in El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and witnessed many economic and racial injustices; and the United Church Board for World Ministries (UCBWM) held a board meeting in El Paso / Juarez, followed by a United Church Board for Homeland Ministries and United Church Board for World Ministries-sponsored consultation in El Paso in 1994;

WHEREAS, the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ and the El Paso United Church of Christ churches have sponsored several conferences and convocations to inform local, national, and regional bodies and persons from both the United States and Mexico about border ministry;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ and its antecedents have had a close relationship with the Iglesias Cristianas Congregacionales de México (Congregational Christian Church of Mexico) and has been involved with Centro Alberto Rembao in Guadalajara and its educational activities about U.S. - Mexico relations and theology in the Americas;

WHEREAS, there exist fertile opportunities for building a common ministry inclusive of religious community, economic development, labor, human rights, youth and students, and cooperative development organizations;

WHEREAS, there is a need for a holistic ministry that recognizes that Latino/Latina/Hispanic, Native American, African-American, Asian-American and Anglo-American sisters and brothers must join in the implementation of a common ministry on the border; and

WHEREAS, to initiate this ministry, we need a broader base of knowledge to provide a better understanding of the multifaceted reality of the Mexican and American border, and we must seek ways to fully commit ourselves to the concept of a common border ministry as well as explore the extraordinary opportunity for ecumenical partnership with those who seek the same;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-second General Synod of the United Church of Christ expresses its concern about the myriad national and international issues of border justice and condemns the unjust treatment and harassment of Latino/Latina/Hispanic persons both at the border and away from the border;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that it is time for a complete transformation and revolution in our minds, that we learn theology and ethics from people who have been pushed to the margins of our society and religion; for example, recent immigrants from south of the border, ministers and members of churches in Mexico and Latin America;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that it is time for a complete transformation and revolution in our hearts, that we care for all members of our family across racial and cultural boundaries; that we risk our emotions, our relationships, our livelihoods, among the oppressed of our nation and the Americas;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that it is time for a complete transformation and revolution in our political will, that we contact and collaborate with churches, civic groups, businesses, non-governmental organizations, social entrepreneurs and with the government officials in other countries which are experiencing serious poverty and population problems, to assist in developing policies and programs for alleviating poverty and the oft-accompanying sense of desperation which propels many people to leave in hopes of finding a better life elsewhere; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that it is time for a complete transformation and revolution in our bodies, that we give our time, talents and treasures: to end human rights abuses against immigrants; to stop environmental racism, especially near the U.S. - Mexico border; to support organizations in both

countries that work for justice; to lobby U.S. and Mexican legislative and executive branches - national, state and local - as well as testify before respective judiciaries; to dialogue with business owners and managers who work near the border;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Twenty-second General Synod of the United Church of Christ thanks local churches who have already been working on these critical issues and invites other local churches, covenant partners, conferences, and associations to a call to conscience in relation to border ministries in our own settings during the next two years. We call on the Commission for Racial Justice, the Board for World Ministries, the Board for Homeland Ministries, and their successors, the Southwest, South Central, and California/Nevada Southern Conferences, and the Council for Hispanic Ministries to coordinate activities and be responsible for a report to the Twenty-third General Synod of the United Church of Christ in 2001.

Funding for this action will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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