



Speak Now, Act Now

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The church is always called to play a prophetic role in the larger culture. Many are aware of John Winebrenner's anti-slavery and abolitionist position and activity in the early years of the Church of God. In 1844, Winebrenner, speaking on behalf of the Church of God, declared that "the system or institution of slavery to be impolitic and unchristian." Winebrenner's position certainly wasn't always popular with the culture at large or even within the Church of God. Over the years, the Church has actively sought to speak out against other issues like abortion, pornography and human trafficking. These positions haven't always been popular positions.

We are facing some strange and perilous times which will require the Church to find its prophetic voice in order to speak and act prophetically once again. We live in a culture filled with fear and that fear is being used to fuel the fires of hatred and prejudice. The issue of immigration has become a subject of increasing concern, discussion and heated debate. President Trump's executive order last week is one such example of the difficult times we find ourselves in.

I know this is a difficult issue. I know there are real fears and concerns at the base of this issue, but we must remember our primary citizenship: we're citizens of the kingdom of God first, before allegiance to a country or political party ideology. We are people who believe that all human beings are made in God's image and therefore deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. We serve a God who makes clear that He expects His people to act kindly and generously toward those who are considered aliens, foreigners, or outsiders.

Let's not give in to fear. Let's not give into the fear we may have of those who are unlike us or those who are foreign to us. Let's not give into the fear we may feel in standing out and taking an unpopular stand: some of us stand to lose friends over such a stand, but we must stand regardless of how unpopular it may be (don't worry, I'm painfully aware that not everyone embraces my view on this subject).

I want to direct you to two or three resources that will help you navigate these difficult waters. Ed Stetzer from Wheaton College has two excellent articles that help us understand how to respond to the current issue of immigration in the United States. I've also included the 13th article from the CGGC's Here We Stand document which was adopted this past summer at the General Conference Sessions in Chambersburg. I think you'll find it very clear, biblically based, and helpful in understanding how to respond in this critical moment.

Let's live well, think well, speak well and act well in this critical moment in our country's history.

Christ's Peace,
Lance

Dear Fellow Christians: It's Time to Speak Up for Refugees by Ed Stetzer

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/january/how-to-respond-as-follower-of-christ-to-trumps-ban-of-refug.html>

One, Broken World: What Christians Need to Recapture in "The Other" by Ed Stetzer

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/january/one-broken-world-what-christians-need-to-recapture-in-other.html>

From the CGGC's *Here We Stand*:

13. Immigration

What Is the Issue?

The world is coming to America. It has been so since colonial times. The United State is a nation of immigrants drawn here by unparalleled wealth, opportunity, security and freedom. Yet at this time in history, immigration has become a highly divisive political issue given the large number of persons who have entered the United States illegally. The issue is complicated because many have come fleeing increasingly lawless regions, some made so in part because of the demand for illicit drugs by the citizens of the United States. Nevertheless these immigrants raise security and other concerns for this country. Some of the tension is also fueled by the somewhat erroneous belief that jobs are lost, when in fact many jobs taken by immigrants are those many Americans refuse. America is now a global economy fueled by the efforts of peoples from around the world, but the Church is often divided over whether compassion or national security should be a deciding factor in the immigration debate, as if it were an either-or proposition.

What Does Scripture Say?

"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:33-34 ESV).

"He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35).

"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31).

“And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Luke 13:29-30).

“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

“And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to break its seals; for you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation’” (Revelation 5:9).

How Do We Understand This?

Christians must remember that they are first citizens of the kingdom of God and their highest goal is to connect people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Given the volatile nature of this issue we must be sure that our absolute allegiance to Christ and His gospel is not lost or diluted by political philosophy or ideology or language. We should remember that we are aliens and strangers in a fallen world that dwells in darkness. We are called to the salt of moral character and the light of spiritual truth on this and other issues.

The Bible is very clear about the absolute necessity of ministering to and protecting the sojourner, providing for their physical well-being and defending them against injustice. In fact, the Church’s default mode is the law of love as demonstrated by Christ which incorporates kindness and mercy.

Christians also believe human government is ordained by God to promote the well-being of a nation; therefore, we should work to support lawful forms of immigration. This means we oppose those who immigrate to this nation for criminal purposes, but should love and welcome those who come for reasons of freedom from political tyranny and/or economic disaster. We should see it as our responsibility to speak out against political solutions that would callously enable these injustices and work to understand and deal with our nation’s complicity and contribution to the destitution of others.

We should also see this great migration as the missionary opportunity it is. As God brings people from other nations and religions into our community, we should seek both to understand them and build respectful relationships that enable the process of redemption of their souls.

How Can We Respond (Minister)?

Churches need to be in prayer for refugees and immigrants around the world. They also need to identify any who live in their community and reach out to them in the name of Jesus, who himself was once a refugee.

Congregations may seek opportunities to provide sanctuary, financial support and care to the outsider and immigrant. In addition, the churches may sponsor refugees and seek to help them become integrated into local culture.

A congregation may open its doors to worship services and/or Bible studies for individuals/congregations from ethnic backgrounds different from that of the local church.

The Church needs to speak for those who have little or no voice and to support acts of social justice and personal care.

Churches need to support and promote the established legal process by helping immigrants achieve resident status and/or citizenship. They can do so by assisting them with any necessary applications and paper work, and by working for change in the process when and where needed.

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