

# God's love has **NO** borders

## Information

In the biblical tradition of hospitality, the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board, at the request of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference and Iglesia Menonita Hispana (IMH), encourages congregations to act on the Atlanta 2003 Immigration Statement during the critical month of March 2006 (see *Action*).

*"Let love be genuine ...Extend hospitality to strangers."*  
Romans 12: 9a, 13b  
*"And who is my neighbor?"* Luke 10:29b

### Our church

Millions of immigrants in the United States live in fear of discrimination and deportation. In addition to being neighbors in our communities and necessary to our economy, these immigrants are our sisters and brothers in Mennonite Church USA.

Most of our conferences have members who were born outside of the United States and some of them may be undocumented. Members who are legal immigrants and U.S. citizens and aren't Anglo are sometimes harassed without cause because of their skin color or their accent. Many immigrants are members of Mennonite Church USA congregations and have planted churches across the United States. Some Mennonites employ immigrants; some provide social services to these sisters and brothers among us.

### Current legislation

Reform of the visa process is long overdue. Laws need to be honest about our economy's dependence on immigrant labor and fair to the people who provide it. However, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R. 4437), passed by the U.S. House of Representatives just before Christmas 2005, is restrictive and punitive.

#### H.R. 4437 would:

- Make being in the country without documents an aggravated felony, placing all 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States at risk of arrest, detention and deportation.

- Criminalize church workers and social service providers, expanding the definition of "alien smuggling" to include aiding undocumented immigrants with food, shelter, transportation or legal advice.
- Give local police authority to enforce immigration laws, undermining trust with immigrant communities and discouraging undocumented victims or witnesses of crime from coming forward.
- Build a 700-mile fence along the 2,000-mile U.S./Mexico border and add 8,000 new Border Patrol agents, increasing deaths in the desert and costing billions of dollars.
- Limit immigrants' rights in court, leading to fewer hearings, less review and more deportation for many categories of immigrants and asylum seekers.
- Require employers to verify workers' immigration status using a massive, faulty database that lacks privacy protections.

#### What this means for us:

- Mennonites who are undocumented could become felons.
- Congregations and communities with undocumented members and neighbors will be disrupted.
- Any assistance to an undocumented person becomes a felony. Our pastors say, "We're not going to ignore immigrants; it's not biblical and it's not pastoral. We're not going to make people have green cards before they become members of Mennonite Church USA." Some West Coast pastors are willing to go to jail rather than curtail welcoming any who wish to come to church.
- Some family members have documents and some don't. Often the children have papers and wage-earning parents do not. IMH congregations wonder if Mennonites will help support families if wage earners are suddenly deported and children are left here alone.
- Mennonites who employ immigrants may need to add staff to verify immigration status.

### Action

Our task is to change this law so that offering biblical hospitality is not illegal. We also need to change the laws so that immigrant families can be reunited, undocumented immigrants can have a path to citizenship, future workers can come and go safely and the border can be demilitarized.

Just a few voices in support of fair immigration policy can give legislators the courage to do what they believe. Currently, legislators are receiving overwhelming numbers of contacts from people angry at immigrants. Now is a crucial time for you and your congregation to speak on behalf of immigrants and those who assist them—to "speak out for those who cannot speak," as Proverbs 31:8 instructs.

**Visit OneSource** [[www.MennoniteUSA.org/resources](http://www.MennoniteUSA.org/resources)] for information about how to fax your legislator **during March** and to find other resources for your congregational life of biblical hospitality.