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I. Background

The matter regarding the migration of workers came onto the agenda of the denomination through the work of a study committee commissioned by Classis Zeeland in 2006 to address a pastoral concern arising from one of its congregations. This local church had engaged in ministry to mainly Latino migrant workers for several years, offering classes in English as a second

language, Bible studies, and other kinds of practical help to families in need, including, on some occasions, legal assistance regarding immigration and work status. The congregation wanted to receive into membership some of these families who professed faith in Christ, but given the strong Reformed tradition of “fencing the table” from those who are known to persist in sinful behavior, they asked for advice from classis to determine if living without status in a country was inconsistent with the demands for life lived according to God’s will. Unhappily, due to the presentation in the overture, the broader issue of ministering to immigrant neighbors and addressing their needs was eclipsed by a discussion that focused on church discipline. Synod 2007 rejected Overture 6, apologizing for the hurt caused by the tone and thrust of the overture, its lack of inclusive language, and its narrow focus. However, Synod 2007 did recognize the need to address the conditions under which undocumented migrants in both Canada and the United States live, and thus it formed a committee to report and recommend how the Christian Reformed Church in North America might better address the needs of those who are marginalized by their lack of legal status.

II. Introduction

The mandate given to the committee was “to study the issue of the migration of workers as it relates to the church’s ministries of inclusion, compassion, and hospitality, and to propose ways for the church to advocate on behalf of those who are marginalized” (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 596).

During its term from October 2007 to May 2009, the committee was intentional about keeping the process transparent and inclusive. The committee consulted many stakeholders and others with specialized knowledge on the issues involved. Interviews were conducted with immigrants—both with and without legal status—a focus group with diverse community leaders was convened, and consultations with agencies of the CRC were held in an effort to hear and understand different perspectives. This report is the result of the thoughtful deliberations of the committee in addressing a very sensitive and multifaceted issue.

III. Historical perspective—an immigrant church

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) was born within a community of immigrants. Less than two decades after the first group of Dutch dissenters began settling in Michigan and Iowa in the 1840s and through successive waves of migration since then, this denomination made ministry to Reformed Dutch immigrants central to its mission. Now that the CRCNA embraces a broader multicultural mission in North America, the opportunity arises once again to serve recent arrivals, their children, and their growing communities. The Christian Reformed Church has a built-in store of ministry experience and sympathy for the struggles of the newly arrived that can be put to strategic service today. The challenge, of course, is to transpose that experience to embrace new people and new circumstances.

Many Christian Reformed members, particularly in Canada, are personally familiar with the post-World War II wave of immigration to Canada. As the Netherlands recovered from the ravages of war, many families sought a better life than was possible in Holland—opportunities to start businesses, obtain housing, and own farms. CRC members in Canada actively engaged

in the lives of those who arrived, sponsoring them by providing employment, cultural orientation, and social support. Immigration societies on both sides of the ocean organized the sponsorship of these immigrants; and while sponsorship was not a legal requirement, it eased the transition for many families. Upon arrival in Canada, the immigrants were granted landed immigrant¹ status. Many immigrants became naturalized citizens after the five-year minimum waiting period. It was in the context of Christian faith and fellowship that many felt called to become involved in these immigration societies. Welcoming new arrivals from Holland in the 1950s made an impact on both the “hosts” and those “hosted,” and integrating those “strangers” into the life of the CRC in Canada forever changed what it would be.

Although not subsidized financially by either the Dutch government or the Canadian government, immigration was strongly encouraged. The Dutch immigrant community itself also provided social support for new immigrants. Their social lives revolved around Christian Reformed congregations that grew by leaps and bounds, particularly from 1951-1953. The ministers of the churches, who were appointed by Home Missions in Grand Rapids, helped the newcomers as they settled in Canada in ways beyond pastoral duties. Therefore, the success of this immigration to Canada was largely due to motivation brought on by economic opportunities, strong community and governmental support, and a church structure that openly advanced the cause of the immigrant.

The denomination again responded to God’s call to “welcome the stranger” in the 1960s when Cuban refugees began to arrive in the United States in the aftermath of the Castro revolution. In fact, the first works of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee included sponsoring and supporting Cuban refugee families in Miami. Many refugee families were sponsored by CRC families and became part of our communities and congregations—black beans and rice were on the tables for perhaps the first time at CRC potlucks. Because of CRC members’ willingness to embrace those who were in need of social, financial, and spiritual support, and because of those refugee families’ willingness to contribute their unique culture and strengths to their new communities, the CRC is a stronger, more diverse, and more vibrant community today.

The CRCNA again “welcomed the stranger” in the 1970s during a large influx of Southeast Asian refugees from war-torn countries like Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. In the 1980s and 1990s, West African immigrants began to arrive, seeking asylum from political upheaval and violence in their home countries. Today, the Pacific Hanmi classis continues to welcome more and more new immigrant families from Korea. Over and over, it seems that God has called upon members of Christian Reformed churches to respond to the needs of these new strangers in our midst. Because of this unique call, the CRC has grown, changed, and strengthened to become who it is today.

IV. Overview of current migration issues

A. Migration to the United States

In the global economy, what any one nation does can have a wide effect on many other nations. In the Western Hemisphere this has meant that the

¹ Permanent residents.

economic policies of the United States, though helping the United States to become one of the wealthiest nations on earth, has in the opinion of many had a negative effect on the economic situation of many other nations, including Mexico and the nations of Latin America. Since those lands face dire economic conditions, and since the prospect of a far better life in the neighboring United States looks so promising, millions have decided to try to make a new beginning in the greener pastures of the United States. While many who choose to leave their country would prefer to stay near their friends and families, often poverty compels them to leave. The promise of sufficient salaries, free public education, and sending financial support back home are often cited as reasons immigrants from that region come north.

The journey is different for each new immigrant, but for many it is a harrowing one. Some pay thousands of dollars per person to professional smugglers to sneak into the United States. Others spend days crossing the deserts of the southern U.S. border, often making several attempts before having success. Border fences have made crossing possible in only the most dangerous places, which has caused deaths of dozens of migrants each year who are still willing to take the risk. Other immigrants recount stories of having ridden atop trains from their home countries in Central America through Mexico—stories of limbs severed by moving trains, marauding gangs, robberies, rapes, and weeks of sleepless nights. Regardless of how they come, these immigrants arrive without any possessions or money to restart their lives.

Most Latin American immigrants find work, and many work without a proper visa. Though work visas do exist in small numbers, those lucky enough to receive them have waited for years. Other immigrants may be eligible for family-based visas, but again wait times are long; some immigrants wait twenty years for their applications to be processed. While many undocumented immigrants have a great desire to “get their papers in order,” it is virtually impossible to do that within the current system. If people have entered the United States illegally, there is usually no way to regularize their immigration status without returning to their home country and applying for a visa. Even if they are eligible for a visa—because of marriage to a U.S. citizen, for example—and if it becomes known that they lived for any length of time without status in the United States, they may not attempt to re-enter the U.S. for ten years. Stories of U.S.-citizen parents with U.S.-citizen children who are separated from their spouses because of this ten-year bar are heartbreaking. It is easy to hastily conclude that immigrants should “get in line” and come through the U.S. immigration system in the proper way. The truth is, there is simply no line, nor a proper way, for the vast majority of immigrants who wish to come to the United States. Many immigrants go “around” the system because they cannot go “through” it.

Due to their lack of status, many undocumented immigrants live in fear of authorities such as police officers. Many would rather allow abuse or criminal activity to go unreported than to speak to the police, fearing discovery of their lack of status more than they fear the threat of crime. This is particularly poignant in stories of women in abusive relationships, whose fear of separation from their children because of deportation compels them to stay in dangerous situations. Many community workers point to the decrease in safety for all who live in a community where some are known to be afraid to report crimes. We are all less safe when there are so many who live in fear.

All children who are born in the United States are U.S. citizens by birthright. This has led to a new complexity of today’s immigrant situation: mixed-status families. While undocumented parents face the threat of deportation daily, their U.S.-born daughters and sons have never known the country and culture to which the family may be forced to return. Deported parents must make the heart-wrenching decision of whether to leave their American-born children behind to continue their education and pursue their dreams, or to remain as a family unit despite the prospect of poverty, a language their children may not speak, and the same barriers to success that drove the family to immigrate in the first place.

Other parents leave children behind in their home countries when they cross the border, believing the journey to be too dangerous or too expensive to bring all the family members. Many who leave family behind, leave them for good: it has become so difficult in the past decade to cross the U.S. border without documents that few immigrants ever return to their home countries. Births, graduations, sicknesses, funerals, all of life’s important events take place without them, leaving them to celebrate and to grieve these times alone in a strange new country. The scars this leaves on both children and parents are irreparable.

The CRC also has a high number of Korean immigrants, some of whom are also without documents. While the reasons for and means of migration differ depending on what part of the world an immigrant comes from, the vulnerability of undocumented immigrants remains constant regardless of a person’s nation of origin. Instead of fleeing poverty as they did forty years ago, today’s Korean immigrants often come seeking educational opportunities and a more accepting culture (a divorce or a disability might prompt an immigrant to seek a culture outside of Korea, for example). Many Korean immigrants come initially with a short-term tourist visa, simply choosing to remain after it has expired. In fact, estimates show that almost half of all undocumented immigrants in the United States are “visa over-stays.”

Today’s Korean CRC pastor is typically well-versed in the needs of such undocumented immigrants—often providing translation services, help with meeting basic needs like securing food and shelter, and connecting families with services like medical help and spiritual support. Korean congregations are often much more aware than other CRC congregations of the difficulties that undocumented families face.

B. Migration to Canada

The immigration system in Canada is different than that of the United States in many ways. One clear difference is the speed of the bureaucracy; the Temporary Foreign Worker Program is a relatively new program, and many applications are processed very quickly because of the high demands of industries like construction. Those who qualify for this program arrive in Canada with legal status, but it is temporary. They are not permitted to bring family members with them, nor is there a means to adjust to a more permanent status through this program. Because many of these immigrants come to Canada for the economic opportunity of employment, they fear to leave the country as required—they worry that leaving will allow someone else to be hired in their place. Staying in the country without legal documents opens

the door to exploitation, and many immigrants wind up being taken advantage of without the chance of their rights being protected.

Canada also has immigrants without status who came claiming refugee status, but were denied. When refugee claimants enter the country, they are given an opportunity to make a legal claim of persecution. This claim often takes years to process. While they wait, they establish themselves in their new community—some join churches, get jobs, have children. Often, if that claim is denied, these immigrants fear returning to their home country, and they simply choose to remain in Canada as undocumented immigrants. Again, without legal status, they are vulnerable to exploitation. They are often isolated by a new fear of deportation, having escaped their former fears of severe persecution and violence in the country from which they fled.

C. Conclusion

Since the first worshipers gathered as the Christian Reformed Church, God has used the CRC as an agent of hospitality toward those who find themselves in a new land. This is the case today as churches in the United States and Canada welcome “strangers” who share belief in Christ and who long for the community that can be found in the body of Christ.

The situation of undocumented immigrants forces the church to face new complexities, as the church seeks to live out God’s call to hospitality. Whenever there are people living on the margins of society, it is the role of the church to see them, enfold them, and give them an opportunity to flourish. Whenever there is injustice or oppression, it is the role of the church to advocate for righting what is wrong. And whenever there are half-truths, hasty conclusions, and inaccurate assessments, it is the role of the church to tell the truth.

We have been blessed by countless “strangers in our midst” who have changed the CRCNA into the people we are today. Out of a total of 1,057 congregations, the Christian Reformed Church in North America today includes 61 multiethnic congregations, 86 Korean congregations, 28 Hispanic congregations, 8 Chinese, and 8 Laotian congregations, as well as many other congregations representing other people groups, including Cambodian, Filipino, French, Haitian, Hmong, Indonesian, and Vietnamese. Perhaps in the 1940s, referring to the CRC as an “immigrant church” referenced the church’s Dutch heritage, but today the CRC is a church with immigrants whose heritages stem from many countries around the world.

As the CRC seeks to welcome the stranger today, it is not only a call to hospitality but also a recognition of our immigrant past that uniquely qualifies us to serve the new immigrant.

V. Overview of current North American immigration laws and policies

For a long time Canada and the United States have tried to secure the land and sea borders against illegal access by those who would enter without passing through inspection. Amid increasing concerns about national security, especially after the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City in September 2001, these efforts have intensified. However, in doing so, they have led to the creation of many imperfect and contradictory laws and policies. Although both Canada and the United States work closely to monitor and regulate the numbers and types of persons entering the continent,

they differ in the way newcomers and especially those without status or refugees are treated. These differences are briefly described below.

A. Current immigration law and policies in Canada

According to its 2006 census, Canada’s population stands at around 33 million persons. This includes citizens and permanent residents. Citizens are those who are born in Canada or are born to Canadian parents who live overseas, or those to whom citizenship is granted or conferred by the state. Immigrants and refugees² who are given permanent resident status are allowed to apply for citizenship after having lived in Canada for three consecutive years.

1. Permanent residents and visitors

There are four pathways to permanent resident (PR) status in Canada. A person can become a Canadian citizen

- as an economic immigrant under the skilled (independent) migrant category and/or business/investor class.
- if sponsored as a family class member from overseas by family members in Canada.
- if an application is made and is accepted as a refugee (sponsored or in-land).
- if a person is eligible as a live-in caregiver; as someone who is able to prove that they have been employed in Canada continuously in their profession for over two years.

In addition to immigrants and refugees (sponsored or claiming asylum in-land), Canada welcomes a large number of visitors every year. They may arrive as tourists, students, or temporary foreign workers. Canada has a Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program, which contracts with individuals from participating countries such as Mexico and the Caribbean islands to spend about half a year working on farms in Canada. Workers and students are required to obtain employment or student permits in addition to their visit visas.

Visitors are expected to return to their country of origin after their temporary residence permit expires, or to apply to renew their permit for a further term.

Canada accepts approximately 250,000 new permanent residents per year. Of that number about 60 percent become citizens due to economic factors and 40 percent become citizens on account of family and humanitarian and compassionate reasons.

2. Refugee determination system

While Canada’s refugee determination system may be one of the most progressive in the world, refugee status decisions are made by one person and there is no appeal process for questionable decisions. In a simplified format, refugee or “protected person” status is conferred to two categories of asylum seekers: those who arrive in Canada seeking protection (in-land) and those who are selected and brought from overseas into Canada by the government and private sponsors (re-settled). In-land claimants go through a process of determination by appearing before a quasi-tribunal

² Also referred to as *protected persons*.

known as the Immigration and Refugee Board which determines if the claim for protection is credible. Those overseas are selected by the government in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Both the government and private sponsors³ are allowed to name refugees for resettlement, and those who arrive in Canada are given their PR status upon arrival. At this writing in 2009, Canada resettles about 12,000 refugees annually.

3. Persons without status

In addition, there are currently about 200,000 to 300,000 persons living in Canada without status. These are mainly individuals who have not returned to their home country after their temporary permits have expired, or they are failed refugee claimants who have not left Canada. They live and work in Canada and send their children to school, but they live in constant fear of being deported by the Canadian authorities.

B. Current immigration laws and policies in the United States

Foreign nationals are typically granted entry into the United States in one of two broad categories: nonimmigrant or immigrant.⁴ Non-immigrants are almost always granted a specified “period of stay” (ranging from ninety days to several years), while people who enter the United States with an “immigrant visa” are then granted permanent resident status. A non-immigrant is permitted to engage in only those activities for which the visa was granted, while permanent residents have most of the rights of citizens (such as being able to hold any job or move anywhere within the country), except the right to vote.

The most common non-immigrant categories include students; tourists; business visitors and individuals with various types of work authorization; professionals with specialty degrees; investors, managers, and executives of multinational companies.

There are also a limited number of H-2B visas available for non-agricultural “seasonal” workers (66,000 for fiscal 2008) and an unlimited number of H-2A visas available for agricultural workers. The annual quota of H-2B visas is typically insufficient to meet the demand, while the H-2A program, because of the requirements it imposes on employers with respect to minimum hours, free housing, and other requirements, is not widely utilized. Some recent information suggests annual H-2A admissions of fewer than 50,000 workers.

Immigrant visas are divided into two principal categories: family-based and employment-based.

A person who enters the United States without obtaining a visa and without being formally admitted by a United States immigration officer is characterized as having “entered without inspection.” At the present time, it is extremely difficult under current law for persons who entered without inspection to obtain lawful status. Current estimates of those who have “entered without inspection” and those who have overstayed their visas—

³ For a detailed description of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program in Canada, visit the Citizens for Public Justice website: <http://cpj.ca/refugees/index.html?ap=1&x=102947>.

⁴ There are several additional categories as well, such as asylum seekers and refugees, but people who enter in these categories are a relatively small number.

collectively referred to as “illegal aliens” or “unauthorized migrants”⁵—stand at anywhere between 12-14 million individuals. The overwhelming majority are Hispanic, most from Mexico.⁶ A 2009 report from the Pew Hispanic Center examines where and how these persons without status live and work.

The following are among the key findings:

- Most illegal immigrants live in families in which the adults are persons without status but the children are United States-born. An estimated 13.9 million people, including 4.7 million children, live in families in which the head of household or the spouse is an unauthorized immigrant.
- Undocumented immigrants continue to outpace the number of legal immigrants—a trend that has held steady since the 1990s. While the persons without status continue to concentrate in places with existing large communities of Hispanics, they are also increasingly settling throughout the rest of the country.
- Among the U.S. states experiencing the greatest growth in undocumented immigrant population are Arizona, North Carolina, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho—places not traditionally considered centers for immigration.
- Undocumented immigrants arriving in recent years tend to have more education than those who have been in the country a decade or more. One-quarter have at least some college education. Nonetheless, persons without status as a group are less educated than other segments of the United States population.
- Undocumented immigrants can be found working in many sectors of the United States economy. About 3 percent work in agriculture; 33 percent have jobs in service industries; and substantial numbers can be found in construction and related occupations (16 percent) and in production, installation, and repair (17 percent).
- Undocumented immigrants have lower incomes than both legal immigrants and native-born Americans.⁷

C. Summary

Even for a person applying legally for permanent residency, the system can be complex and unnerving. There are many legal and procedural complications to navigate, and that sometimes makes immigration consultancy a lucrative source of income for unethical opportunists. Stories abound of potential immigrants either parting with large sums of money to have their applications processed or being swindled by unscrupulous consultants; some applicants have to return home after their application process was mishandled by the people they paid to help with the process.

⁵ The term *unauthorized migrant* means a person who *resides* in the United States but who is not a U.S. citizen, has not been admitted for permanent residence, and is not in a set of specific authorized temporary statuses permitting longer-term residence and work.

⁶ NPR website (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4703307>) visited on April 12, 2008. Also visit Pew Hispanic Centre website for more details on unauthorized migrants at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>.

⁷ Visit Pew Hispanic Centre website for more details on unauthorized migrants at <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>.

No system is insulated from abuse, and the immigration systems of Canada and the United States are no exception. Misrepresentation, fraud, impersonation, and every imaginable type of infringement occurs, serving only to hurt people who should be welcomed. Sadly, the attitudes of public officials and those who formulate policies and regulations often focus on border control rather than on welcome.

VI. Social and economic implications of immigration

The life of the church and society has changed markedly since the post-World War II influx of immigrants from Europe. Economic imbalance, poverty, conflict, and population shifts have affected the movement of people and immigration patterns into North America and the industrialized West.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees currently estimates that there are about 11-12 million persons seeking asylum as refugees (those forced to leave their country of residence) and approximately 26 million individuals who have been internally displaced within their own countries.⁸ Economic hardships, the effects of globalization, and humans' innate desire to improve their lives have led many people from developing countries to seek greener pastures in countries such as Canada and the United States, which frequently experience a shortage of the workers they need to keep their economies robust. Businesses in Canada and the United States have had to look to foreign labor to shore up their dwindling work forces. The fact remains that as long as Western countries need migrant workers to help maintain their current socioeconomic lifestyles and as long as there are sufficient economic, social, and political reasons for those in the least developed countries to leave their homelands, there will be steady flows of people moving from the global south to the north in the years to come. In fact, the Pew Research Center predicts⁹ that if current trends continue, the population of the United States will rise to 438 million in 2050, from 296 million in 2005, and 82 percent of the increase will be due to immigrants. A similar report released by Statistics Canada states that, based on current trends, 20 percent of persons in Canada will be minorities by the year 2017¹⁰ and 25 percent will be foreign born. In urban centers such as Toronto and Vancouver, these figures would be significantly higher.

Beginning in the 1970s, with changes in American immigration laws no longer favoring European immigrants, a significant increase began in the number of immigrants and temporary workers from developing countries, based more on human capital and labor market demands than any other factor. While both Canada and the United States encourage educated, qualified, and skilled economic immigrants and their families to apply for and obtain permanent resident visas (or what is commonly referred to as the "Green Card" in the United States) that enable them to reside and work in these countries, each country sets annual quotas for such applicants. They also have additional quotas for family members who want to join those who

⁸ UNHCR website (<http://www.unhcr.org/statistics/STATISTICS/4852366f2.pdf>) accessed in March 2008.

⁹ Pew Research Centre website: <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/85.pdf>.

¹⁰ Statcan website: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/11-008-XIE/2005003/articles/8968.pdf>.

are already established here. In addition to immigration on a permanent resident basis, Canada brings in significant numbers of *temporary* foreign workers to fill labor shortages in sectors such as agriculture and construction. Visitors to Canada and the United States who are granted temporary visit visas are another group of individuals who enter the continent for purposes ranging from studying, volunteering, and visiting family to simply sightseeing. All of these categories, including refugees who are sponsored for resettlement in these two countries, make up the list of those who live and reside, albeit temporarily for some, legally in these two nations. These immigrants arrive with a variety of experiences and resources and are able to become economically independent quickly and contribute to the economic, social, cultural, and political landscape of these two countries.

However, undocumented persons have also made their way to both Canada and the United States—often for reasons of extreme poverty and economic hardship—and are living and working without any legal basis. These individuals are unable to enjoy a lifestyle without restrictions and must learn to live within the inconsistencies of the laws. For example, in some states, they may be able to buy a home and open a savings account, but they may not be able to renew their driver's license or other identity documents. Many of these individuals are employed in precarious work and are over-represented in sectors such as agriculture, hospitality, and construction. They are often open to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and victimized by a system that does not recognize the human value of the individual—only their contribution to the gross national product. Many choose to remain because life in their country of origin is far worse or because their North American born children would find it difficult to return to a different way of life. Ironically, however, although these individuals are labeled as "illegal," the host countries really cannot afford to remove all of them for fear of severely impairing their local economies. Consequently, both countries adopt practices that reflect a double standard.

VII. Biblical-theological background

A. Introduction

In addressing the issue of the migration of workers, a few key points need to be noted at the outset. First, we note that the biblical witness does not speak specifically to the situation currently being faced in the North American context. Socioeconomic and political situations vary from age to age and from place to place such that it would be naïve to treat the Bible as presenting material that is a "one size fits all" answer to every conceivable legal or political scenario. We realize that we cannot proof-text our way to an answer to every question that arises in this area. We will contend that key principles can be drawn especially from the Old Testament and God's commands to the ancient Israelites—principles that properly help us frame and parse contemporary issues—but we do not wish to commit the error of adopting God's theocratic blueprint for Israel as though it represents governmental structures, laws, and policies that must be incorporated into the United States or Canada also today.

No modern state is the equivalent of ancient Israel. Furthermore, the church is not called to reinvent the equivalent of Israel within any nation

today. The church is now the New Israel and is transnational in nature, transcending as a spiritual community the distinctions that arise from allegiances to a given country. As Christians, we need to address issues of the migration of workers from an ecclesiastical context as informed by biblical-theological principles and teachings. Although we witness to the powers-that-be and may advocate for certain policies, we do not want to act as though our goal is a “Christian nation” modeled on the theocracy of ancient Israel. Believers from both the right and the left are frequently tempted to cherry-pick the Old Testament in order to give various policies and stances a divine stamp of approval. Hence, some more conservative believers sometimes suggest that because ancient Israel treated something like adultery as a crime, the government today should adopt the same stance. Meanwhile, more liberal believers—while criticizing the conservatives attempt to “legislate morality”—nevertheless seize on other aspects of ancient Israel in order to promote various policy positions on poverty and public welfare. Both sides are correct that we may draw broad guidance from the Bible in terms of how to think about a given society, but both sides are incorrect in attempting too neatly to transfer Israel’s laws and political structures onto contemporary society or any one government.

These caveats are vital to the discussion on migration of workers. However, important though it is that we avoid blurring these lines between ancient Israel and modern states, Christian believers are still obligated to let the biblical witness inform their thinking on a range of issues. Scripture reveals to us the heart of God. So even when we properly keep in mind the hermeneutical distinctions mentioned above, nevertheless it is true that insofar as something like the laws of Israel reveal to us enduring truths about God’s desires for this creation and for us as his people, we are right to move from biblical principles of justice to ideas that, broadly speaking at least, inform our thinking as a church community today. What follows is an attempt to draw out from the Old and New Testaments salient ideas that we believe are relevant to the questions confronting us regarding the migration of workers in North America. Although we will not attempt to develop a full-blown “theology of the stranger” in this report, both the Old and New Testaments are consistent enough in their treatment of aliens and strangers that we can begin to discern the contours of what such a theology may look like.

B. The Old Testament

After the cosmic dramas that make up the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the biblical narrative focuses on just one man: Abram. Through this one man and through the descendants that God would graciously grant to him and his wife, Sarai, the world would one day be renewed and redeemed. God will move from the particular to the general, from one lone couple to all the nations of the earth. From the biblical text of Genesis 12, it appears that Abram is already well situated and content living in the land of Haran. Abram and his father’s household appear well-established and fairly wealthy, possessing significant land and many possessions, flocks, herds, and other goods. Certainly it would have made perfect sense had Yahweh come to Abram and said, “Stay right where you are. You’re already off to a good start, but I will increase your flocks and herds and land holdings and

I will grant to you a family in your old age so that in Haran, I can begin my renewal of all things.”

God said no such thing. Instead, the very first word God speaks to Abram is “Leave” (Gen. 12:1). God would do a mighty work and would multiply Abram’s descendants, but the first step in all that was for Abram to become a wanderer in a new land—a migrant person who had to leave all that he had in order to start from scratch in a land far away and where he would have no prior claims whatsoever. Like all immigrant and refugee peoples thereafter, Abram would be cast out into a place that would make him vulnerable. A scant ten verses into the story of Abram we discover that the land to which God had directed him was enduring a famine. With no stockpiles of resources to fall back on, Abram and company had to leave for Egypt “because the famine was severe” in the very place to which God had directed them (Gen. 12:10).

Although Egypt afforded the opportunity to secure food and drink for his starving family, being a stranger in yet another strange land revealed still more vulnerability. The Egyptians noted that Sarai was attractive and suggested her to the Pharaoh as a new member of his harem. Abram’s subsequent lying about Sarai (saying she was his sister) succeeded in feathering Abram’s nest as the Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts on account of his lovely “sister.” But Abram’s lack of trust in God’s providence brought about God’s displeasure, and this, in turn, brought disease on Pharaoh’s household. As a result, Abram was once again forced to leave after being exiled from Egypt by a Pharaoh, angry at Abram’s deception.

All of this takes place in one short biblical chapter consisting of just twenty verses. We see Abram forced to become a migrant and see immediately the multiple vulnerabilities that this new status brought to a man who previously would have been safe and secure from all such threats. It is frequently noted that Abram is the father of the faith, the grand patriarch of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Yet at the deepest level of Abram’s experience—at the very core of his identity as the one chosen by God to renew the face of the earth—there is an immigrant experience. In the rest of Scripture—both the Old and New Testaments—a concern to care for those who are also vulnerable due to being displaced occurs again and again and again. There may be many theological reasons why God did not found his mighty nation in Haran. Radical dependence on God and upon the lovingkindness of God is best forged through precisely the extremes of experience that God forced on Abram and Sarai. Perhaps that is why there was a twenty-five year gap between the promise of a child (already an unlikely prospect when it was first spoken) and the actual birth of Isaac. Similarly that is why, having at long last received his one and only son, Abraham is later asked to sacrifice him. Again and again God tested Abraham’s faith by forcing him into extreme circumstances.

The main point to be noted at this juncture and for the purpose of this report is that the experience of being displaced—of being a migrant and a refugee—lies at the very heart of the biblical narrative. Abram, Sarai, and their family became an immigrant people not out of political or economic necessity but by divine decree, and although this source of being displaced may be unique, the *experience* of being a stranger in a strange land has some common elements for all people, no matter what the original cause of their

displacement may have been. Before the Abraham cycle of stories concludes—in a passage that is often underappreciated in terms of its poignancy—Abraham purchases his very first piece of Canaan when he bargains to purchase a plot of land to bury Sarah. “I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead” (Gen. 23:4). When you are an alien in land not your own, you are forced—even in a time of death and grief—to rely on the kindness of strangers. All that Abraham went through as a result of the divine election of his becoming the founder of the renewal of all the earth is seared deeply into the consciousness of Jews and Christians alike.

Several generations after Abraham purchased his first piece of Canaan to bury Sarah, his descendants again became strangers in a strange land when famine led them once more to Egypt, where Joseph had become the Pharaoh’s right-hand man. Through the surprising providence of God, the reprehensible actions of Joseph’s brothers yielded a situation that saved not only the family of Jacob but also the lives of untold others in Egypt and many surrounding nations. God’s promise that Abram and his kin would become a blessing to the entire earth had a glimmer of fulfillment through Joseph’s supervision of food distribution during a severe famine throughout that region of the earth. For the family members of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, living in Egypt set up a longer term situation that would ultimately turn sour. The final phrase of the Book of Genesis refers to “a coffin in Egypt” (Gen. 50:26). However, the story doesn’t end in Egypt because just a few verses prior to the report of Joseph’s being placed “in a coffin in Egypt,” Joseph had prophesied that the day would come when the family would return to the land of promise and that when they did, his bones needed to be properly buried there.

In the intervening four centuries before that took place, the history of God’s people passed through a dark and cruel time as they became enslaved to Egyptians who feared the Hebrew people as a potential threat living among them. In and through all that happened, God’s promises were also marching forward. By the time biblical readers arrive at Exodus 1, the people of Israel are referred to (for the first time in the Bible) as “a nation,” or *yam* in Hebrew. This report is not the place to rehearse all the events of the exodus from Egypt led by Moses, but this is most certainly the place to notice that the experience of being an alien people in a strange land is seared—or is supposed to be seared—deeply into the consciousness of all subsequent generations.

For this reason much of the Pentateuch concerns itself with laws and practices for Israel that are designed both to build on their collective experience of having been strangers who were once oppressed in a foreign land *and* to make sure that Israel itself never become guilty of similar oppression of the strangers and aliens in her midst. Repeatedly in the laws and commands and statutes that Yahweh gave to Israel through Moses, the people were taught two key connected facts: first, the laws and festival holy days of Israel—including even the celebration of high and holy holidays like Passover—applied to and were open to strangers in their midst as well as to the people of Israel themselves; and, second, God reserves a special place in his heart for society’s most vulnerable people: widows, orphans, and aliens.

On the Sabbath, strangers were to be given a day of rest the same as any Israelite. In fact, by the time the Ten Commandments are repeated to Israel in the Book of Deuteronomy, the entire basis of the Sabbath gets grounded in Israel’s experience as an oppressed people in Egypt. Whereas the text of Exodus 20:11 grounded the practice of Sabbath in creation and the Lord’s having taken a day of rest, the text of Deuteronomy 5:15 grounds Sabbath in the Israelite experience of being an oppressed people in Egypt who were never given rest. “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt” God declared. Curiously, this is the only significant variation in the two versions of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Among other things, this may indicate that Sabbath has roots in both creation and redemption. But it may also indicate that as the time drew closer for the Israelites to return to the promised land of Canaan, the practice of remembering their slave experience became increasingly important. The Israelites who heard the law repeated on the plains of Moab in Deuteronomy represented a new generation who did not recall slavery in Egypt on a firsthand basis. Their lack of active experience with being oppressed did not, however, relieve them of the need to recall that experience from their collective history as a nation so as to set the tone for all generations to come.

In Moses’ grand sermon that constitutes the bulk of the text in Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are reminded repeatedly to remember their collective experience as slaves even as they are also reminded that the land they will soon enter is a sheer gift of divine grace. As the writer of Psalm 24 would later write, so Moses in essence told the people, “The earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it.” The land and all its goodness represented a divine bequest that the Israelites would occupy as a kind of tenant. It was not finally theirs to hoard—its riches had to be shared with all, including chiefly the strangers and aliens in their midst.

These final reminders in Deuteronomy represent the culmination of the many laws that had been given to the generation of the exodus. The verses that most clearly reveal the heart of God and that summarize how God desires to characterize his people come in Leviticus 19:33-34: “When an alien [Hebrew *gar*] lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” Those two passages are the clearest summary of many similar passages scattered throughout the Pentateuch. The word *gar* occurs twenty-nine times in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and in nearly every instance the text makes clear that the benefits of the promised land were to be extended to strangers as well as to the Israelites themselves and that strangers were to be offered the same protections as the Israelites (even as they would incur the same punishments in case they broke the law).

In sum, there was no significant difference between God’s desire for the Israelites as they enjoyed their lives in the land flowing with milk and honey and God’s desire for the strangers and aliens who lived among them. This is not surprising when we read these words from Leviticus 25:23: “The land [of Canaan] must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.” In other words, God desired Israel to extend to the strangers among them every kindness and courtesy because in so doing, the Israelites would be mirroring their God who extended his grace,

his lovingkindness, to the Israelites who were just as much an immigrant people in God's eyes as anyone else on the earth. In fact, the Israelites were to go beyond merely offering strangers the same benefits and protections as the rest of the people enjoyed; they were required actively to provide extra protections.

Throughout the Old Testament, God makes clear that there is a special place reserved in his heart for the most vulnerable members of society: widows, orphans, and aliens. As David Holwerda once summarized it, God's abiding concern for that triplet of widows, orphans, and aliens reveals a fundamental fact: "The Old Testament teaches that God is scandalized by poverty and wills its abolition."¹¹ Under ordinary circumstances, these three groups of people represented the most vulnerable members of society. In a patriarchal society like ancient Israel, women and children who lacked the protection and status of a male head of the family (a husband and/or a father) were liable to become invisible to the rest of society and could easily have fallen through the social cracks as a result. Similarly, resident aliens who lacked formal citizenship and any claim to land were also liable to mistreatment and had few prospects unless special provision was made. Hence, God repeatedly told the Israelites to make just such special provisions like gleaner laws that instructed farmers and vintners to intentionally leave portions of their fields and vineyards unharvested so that widows and orphans and aliens could come by and gather up provisions. Just before the new generation of Israelites moved in to take the Promised Land for themselves, God reminded them of what is sometimes called God's "preferential option for the poor" through these soaring words in Deuteronomy 10:17-20:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. Fear the LORD your God and serve him.

The biblical material summarized here constitutes the main lines of Old Testament thinking in this area of inquiry. However, there are also a few other verses in the Hebrew canon of Scripture that point to certain other strictures that were also present in ancient Israel. Other passages indicate that under a few well-defined circumstances, certain strangers could represent a *spiritual* threat to the people. If intermarriage with Canaanites or other foreigners, or if the very presence of such aliens among the people, led to religious syncretism or to the tolerating of spiritual practices that God had strictly forbidden, then Scripture was clear that in those specific instances the foreigners who were promoting syncretism or seeking sanction for forbidden rituals needed to be shunned and expelled. As J. Charles Hay pointed out in an essay written for the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are stringent in painting foreigners as a threat to the people of Israel as they resettled the land and re-built Jerusalem and the temple after their decades of captivity and exile in Babylon. At that time the risks of syncretism and a watering down of the traditions handed down from Moses were acute, so Ezra and Nehemiah repeatedly censured those who had intermarried with foreigners. As Hay highlights, the most chilling conclusion

¹¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Volume 3, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, General Editor, page 905 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986).

to any biblical book may be the end of Ezra, where we read a long list of names of men who were "guilty" of having married foreign women. Then the book concludes with the line "All these had married foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives" (Ezra 10:44). A variant on this text includes also the line "and they sent them away with their children." Whether or not that is a valid part of the text, we were told in Ezra 10:17 that at a certain point "they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women." This surely indicates a dire fate (from J. Charles Hay, "The Bible and the Outsider," published by Inter-Church Committee for Refugees, Presbyterian Church of Canada, Toronto, 1996).

Despite this sub-theme, it would be wrong to suggest that this wariness of the stranger constitutes the main line of the Old Testament. It would, therefore, also be wrong for those wishing to promote a more protectionist, closed-border agenda in North America today to seize on these other texts as though they supersede, if not vitiate, the vast majority of other Old Testament passages that so clearly call for an open attitude toward strangers. As the above summary makes clear, the main line of thought when it comes to immigrant peoples in the midst of God's people is that these strangers are to be embraced. If they desire to join with God's people, they are to be welcomed (albeit being required to undergo the covenant sign of circumcision and so also indicating a desire to follow the whole counsel of God). However even short of becoming a formal part of Israel, the very presence of such strangers put the people of Israel under special obligation (and this obligation would not become null and void even if the strangers in question never became members of the Israelite community in any formal way). And the reason is everywhere the same: they themselves had been aliens in Egypt and knew firsthand the horror of being mistreated on account of their alien status. What's more, the Israelites were to see themselves as aliens who lived off the grace of God every single day of their lives. God's kindness and gracious provision to them as aliens on God's earth were to set the tone for how they treated all others they encountered. Unless aliens represented a clear threat to the religious and spiritual integrity of Israel or declared themselves enemies of Yahweh, they were to be enfolded into the community and even granted special privileges and protections along with the other similarly vulnerable members of society, such as widows and orphans.

These themes weave through the entire Old Testament. By the time the biblical reader arrives at prophetic books like Amos, Micah, and Isaiah, God's love for the vulnerable becomes clear in a new way as the prophets indicted Israel for precisely their *failure* to extend special courtesy to the vulnerable. "They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed" (Amos 2:6b-7a). "Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow" (Isa. 1:15-17). God had asked the formerly oppressed Israelites to remember the horrors of oppression as a reason never to oppress the vulnerable in their midst. If history has taught us anything, it is that those who were once oppressed often turn their anger over such mistreatment into a license to then oppress some other group. As someone once noted, the most recent

group to finally get admitted to the country club often becomes the most vocal about keeping out the next discriminated group. God wanted to snap this cycle of oppression.

The fact that God retains this desire for his people to reach out in love to all people will continue to be revealed in the witness of the New Testament. But the premiere Old Testament example of what can happen when the alien in one's midst is treated with love and justice is the story of Ruth. As narrated in the book of Ruth, this story presents us with a character who was vulnerable on multiple fronts. First, she was from Moab and so was a foreign stranger in Israel when she arrived in Bethlehem with her mother-in-law Naomi. Second, although she had married an Israelite man, she was a widow without formal claim to any land or possessions in Israel. Third, she was poor on account of these other two strikes against her and so could survive only if others took some extra care to provide for her.

The story of Ruth begins with emptiness and bitterness and with a high probability of ending badly. The fact that the story has a "happy ending" occurs only because, in this case, God's commands to Israel to enfold the alien and to make extra provisions for the poor and the widow were heeded. Boaz makes sure that the gleaning laws are followed so that poor persons like Ruth would be able to find plenty of grain. Boaz also recognized Ruth's vulnerability to rape and other mistreatment and so extended a special invitation that she glean in no one else's fields but his own so that through his influence over his own workers she could be kept safe. And finally, despite the dangers that could be associated with intermarriage in Israel, Boaz went the extra mile to become the kinsman-redeemer who could marry Ruth and so give her a reliable and solid future in Israel. Like so many others in Israel, Boaz could have gone another way. He could have ignored God's injunctions to give special treatment to the alien and the widow and the poor. But by following God's ways Boaz not only saved Ruth and Naomi from a dire fate, but he also became a key player in the line of people who would one day produce no less than the Christ of God—for Ruth and Boaz became the great-great grandparents of King David. As we will see below, Matthew had a good theological reason to go out of his way to list Ruth specifically in the family tree of Jesus the Christ. For this reason, the person of Ruth is a fitting turning point to direct us to the witness of the New Testament.

C. *The New Testament*

The incarnation of Jesus the Christ and his subsequent ministry represent not only God's definitive move to fulfill the promises made to Abraham to save the whole earth but represent also the ultimate instance of dealing with the alien in our midst. As the Son of God in skin, Jesus of Nazareth represented the quintessential stranger, the one person the likes of whom no one had ever before encountered. As Eugene Peterson paraphrased John 1:14, "the Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." But our "neighborhood" had never before known such a presence and so, not surprisingly, even as Jesus spent his ministry reaching out to the last, least, lost, and lonely members of his own day who were invisible to and so excluded by others, so many in Israel rejected Jesus himself. As John said, Jesus came to those who were his own, but his own people "did not receive him" (1:11).

The Gospel of Matthew carries through some of the themes that emerged in the Old Testament. Matthew is generally regarded as having been written for a reading audience composed of Jews and Jewish-Christians who had recently been converted to embrace Jesus as the Christ of God, the promised Messiah of not only the Jewish people but of all peoples. Thus Matthew took particular care to show not only that the ministry of Jesus would carry on and fulfill all that had begun in the Old Testament but also that, somehow, the very presence of Jesus on this earth would be a test case for how well the people of God could continue to accept and enfold the strangers in their midst.

The theme of Matthew's gospel is "Immanuel," or "God with us." This theme begins in Matthew 1:23, reminding readers of Isaiah's prophecy that the one born of a virgin would be "Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). The gospel is later book-ended with the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20 when Jesus tells his disciples that they could move out into mission to the entire world with the assurance that he was then and would always be Immanuel, the God who would be forever with them: "Surely I am *with you always*, to the end of the age."

Before Immanuel arrives in Matthew 1:25, Matthew gives us a little background as to how God came to be "with us." Matthew goes out of his way to remind us that the way God arrived in this world came through the influence of many who were, at one time, aliens within Israel's gates. Modern readers of the Bible regard Matthew's opening genealogy or "family tree" of Jesus as dull and an odd way to open a book. However, Matthew knew that this genealogy was not only necessary for his Jewish readers to establish Jesus' credentials as a true son of David; it was also necessary as a way to set up a gospel that reaches beyond just Israel to include all peoples.

A typical Jewish genealogy did not include the names of any women. If a family tree were to include any female names, it would be limited to the great patriarchs of Israel: Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca, and Leah. Matthew, however, takes pains to mention—or directly refer to—four very different women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Strikingly, each of these women came from outside Israel and three of the four had something more than vaguely scandalous associated with them. Tamar played the harlot with her father-in-law Judah. Rahab was the head of a brothel in the doomed city of Jericho. Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite when King David forced her into an adulterous liaison with himself. Since Matthew was under no obligation to mention *any* women in this genealogy, it is remarkable that he included these foreign women who, in addition to their non-Israelite background, also conjure up what could be regarded as "skeletons" in Jesus' family closet.

What was Matthew's point? Perhaps he wanted to begin his gospel with a series of reminders that the story of God's people had always been wider than Israel alone, that it had often been advanced in history by the good treatment of aliens in Israel's midst and that even the Christ of God could not emerge into history without a familial past in need of forgiveness and redemption. By constructing his genealogy of Jesus the way he did, Matthew is sounding an inclusive note to his gospel at the very outset. For those with theological eyes to see, Matthew's opening chapter is not a stale and dull

family tree but something that bristles with inclusivity and a wide-reaching grace.

In case we missed Matthew's desire for inclusivity in the opening genealogy, he hits the reader over the top of the head with this theme in Matthew 2 by bringing stargazers from the east to the cradle of the Christ. To Jewish readers in Matthew's day, the presence of the Magi would not have represented an infusion of exotic color and spice into the Christmas story the way many in the church today regard the Magi when the annual Sunday school Christmas pageant is put on for the congregation. The Magi represented a foreign presence and a sinful presence. The Bible directly condemns Magi and their astrological arts. A rabbi writing in the years before Jesus' birth went so far as to say, "He who learns from a magi is worthy of death." These men were the ancient equivalent of people who write horoscopes and try to predict the future by reading what's in the stars. Further, they came from Baghdad, so in all these ways they represented a threat to all that was holy in Israel. And yet Matthew makes a point of bringing them to the cradle of baby Jesus as yet another early signal in this gospel that whatever else "God with us" would mean, it would have meaning for all the people of the earth, not just those already on the inside of certain religious communities.

No sooner do the Magi exit the stage and a series of calamitous events (set off by their visit to Herod) force Mary and Joseph to take their child and flee to Egypt. As many in church history have noted, this makes the holy family itself an emblem of all refugee peoples ever since. The flight into Egypt mirrors Abram's flight there in Genesis 12 as well as Israel's own history of being forced to flee to, and then remain for a time in, that foreign land. Presumably, Mary, Joseph, and their infant child survived their time in Egypt because they themselves found some kind of a welcome from the Egyptians, who must have also provided some kind of lodging and sustenance that preserved the life of no less than God's own Son. Again, early in his gospel Matthew is hitting on themes and sounding various theological notes calculated to get our attention and to force us to widen our vision of who Jesus is, where he came from, and what he came to this world to do.

Throughout his gospel Matthew reinforces this theme in a variety of ways. Jesus reaches out to unclean lepers, Roman centurions, and those plagued by demons. He touches the ritually unclean—dead bodies, menstruating women—who had been ostracized from good society but instead of becoming contaminated and so unclean himself, the purity of Jesus spreads to the sick person, restoring him or her to community. He tells parables that portray the kingdom of God as never being quite what one expects, and so Jesus' followers needed to be careful before leaping too quickly to judgments of various kinds. The good wheat must grow alongside the weeds for now. The modest-looking gospel message Jesus brought to the world might look as puny as mustard seeds and granules of yeast, but its effect would be great. On and on Jesus went, praising the faith of a Canaanite woman and reminding his followers that they'd never be finished with the task of forgiving one another (and so don't ask when the task of forgiveness would come to an end; for now, forgiveness never ends because everyone sins all the time).

Finally, just before the gospel reaches its climax with the arrest of Jesus and all that followed, Jesus had one last thing to say that summed up what "Immanuel" ("God with us") had meant all along: "I tell you the truth,

whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40). Jesus had just used the image of the sheep and the goats to tell his disciples how everything would shake out at the end of time. Interestingly, the one thing the sheep and the goats have in common is their mutual ignorance as to what they had been doing all along. As it turns out, the sheep had not been aware that it had been Jesus whom they had been feeding, welcoming, clothing, and visiting. They had just seen someone hungry and had fed him. They had seen someone thirsty and had provided a drink. They had seen a stranger in their midst and had welcomed him into their lives. They had seen someone naked and had clothed him. They had seen someone in prison and so had spent some time with him. But they didn't know it was Jesus. Similarly the goats had ignored the hungry, thirsty, strange, naked, and imprisoned people they had passed by, but they had no idea that it was finally Jesus whom they were dismissing.

The difference between the sheep and the goats was not that one group went looking for Immanuel in this world and the other did not. The sheep just responded to the vulnerable and to the alien with love. At the end of Matthew, when Jesus told his disciples that he would keep on being "Immanuel" for them, he meant more than the disciples knew. According to Jesus himself in Matthew 25, there is no escaping "God with us." God is with us every time we encounter a stranger in need. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus was not only the incarnation of the Son of God—Jesus was also the living embodiment of something we heard way back in Leviticus and Deuteronomy when Yahweh repeatedly told the Israelites that he loved the aliens, the strangers, and that a big part of God's own self-identity was that he is the one who takes delight in defending the vulnerable of the world.

Beyond Matthew, the other three gospels press the same claim of gospel inclusivity. The parables of Jesus alone build a case for seeing in the presence of the stranger and the poor the presence of God. Luke gives us two of the most memorable such parables in this regard. Scholars note that across all of Jesus' parables as recorded in the New Testament, precisely one parabolic character receives a name: it is the poor man Lazarus in the parable in Luke 16:19-31. But given Luke's theme of lifting up the poor as people especially prized by God, it is no surprise that in Luke Jesus would take a poor person—whom most of the world would not even see—and would elevate his biblical status by giving him a name. Jesus signals in this way that every poor person or stranger whom we meet likewise has a name (and if we would ever bother to get to know such people, we would learn their names too) because they are real people made in God's image and loved by God. What's more, when the rich man begs father Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers, Abraham refuses by tellingly noting, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Indeed, the Pentateuch makes abundantly clear why the Lazarus figures of this world should receive the special treatment that God again and again enjoins on his people for all the poor and vulnerable widows, orphans, and strangers. "They have Moses," Abraham replies to the rich man in torment. Jesus' point is that we *all* have Moses. But are we comprehending what "Moses" is telling us about our treatment of the poor, the vulnerable, and the other strangers in our midst?

Luke's greatest contribution to a "theology of the stranger" comes in his reporting of Jesus' landmark parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. It was an expert in the law who kicked off what has become one of the most famous parables of all time. Jesus reminded this man of the biblical injunction to "love your neighbor as yourself," which prompted this man—ostensibly so well-versed in the law of Israel—to inquire "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:27, 29). As our summary of the Old Testament made clear, the answer to this question is "just about anybody you meet." The reach of God's love is wide, not narrow—it is as all-inclusive as possible, not exclusivist. But the very premise of a question like "And who is my neighbor?" is that there must be relevant restrictions that apply so as to shrink the pool of potential neighbors whom we'd be obligated to love. To explode that kind of thinking, Jesus tells a story. He begins it in Luke 10:30 with a broad, general term; Jesus says that "a man" was traveling to Jericho. In Greek the phrase is *anthropos tis*, which could be loosely translated as "some guy." He didn't tell us it was some Jewish guy (though this could be inferred from his traveling from Jerusalem, but that is not terribly strong evidence in that the Jerusalem of Jesus' day contained also Romans and people of many other backgrounds). No, it's just some guy who fell into the hands of robbers and so needed assistance to live. The man in the ditch at the side of the road could be anybody. And he is anybody, which was just Jesus' point.

Upon encountering the man, the unlikely hero of the story—the Samaritan—does not calculate his actions, he just acts. He does not inspect the man to see if his ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or religion is "right" as a precondition to reaching out to him. He does not launch an investigation to see if his having fallen into the hands of robbers was somehow the victim's fault ("Were you traveling at a safe time of the day? Did you consider bringing along some traveling companions—there's safety in numbers, you know?!"). The good Samaritan does not ask questions, consult a checklist, or launch an investigation to see if this man at the roadside was worthy of help. He simply sees needs and meets them.

Before Jesus finishes this parable, he pulls the rug out from underneath his initial conversation partner and all of us who read the story. This parable is Jesus' extended answer to the law expert's question, "And who is my neighbor?" While reading the parable, we think the bottom line is that the man in the ditch is the neighbor. "Who is your neighbor?" Jesus could have said to the law expert. "Well, your neighbor is that anonymous guy in the ditch. *That's* the neighbor whom you are to love as yourself." But that's not quite what Jesus says. Instead in Luke 10:36 he asks who was the neighbor *to* the man in the ditch. This turns the law expert's question back on him. Based on the law of God in the Old Testament in places like Leviticus and Deuteronomy, our task is not to figure out who "out there" in the wider world is our neighbor. Instead, it's our job to recognize that wherever we are, *we* are the neighbor, *we* are the alien in the presence of other people, and we act lovingly toward all without calculating whether or not the other person is enough like us to be worthy of our attention and care. We are supposed to represent no less than God, and if we look at the world that way, we won't wonder about how to treat others because we will know: we treat others with love because that's how God already treated us. Our job is just to be a chip off the divine block.

In sum, the gospels present the ministry of Jesus as being all-inclusive. But of particular interest to Jesus and to his kingdom were first and foremost precisely those people whom the religious establishment in his day excluded—in great contradistinction to everything God had taught in his law. The last, least, lost, and lonely fringe members of the world—the strangers in our midst—were the ones Jesus saw and loved first of all. If such people had a special place in Yahweh's heart in the Old Testament, they would clearly occupy a special niche in the kingdom Jesus brought as well.

The community that continued Jesus' ministry after his ascension into heaven would struggle with this. Questions of who was in and who was out—as well as larger questions as to who should even be invited to come into the community in the first place—would continue to plague the disciples-turned-apostles for some time (as the book of Acts makes clear). Paul and Peter nearly came to blows over the question of Gentile inclusion and whether they first had to become observant Jews *before* they could become also followers of Jesus the Christ. It took no less than a divine vision to motivate Peter to call on Cornelius and his family in Acts 10. But Peter did get the message eventually and so was later able to write to his fellow believers, "Live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear" (1 Pet. 1:17). When we see ourselves as resident aliens in this world—when we realize that the call of God makes us, as Hebrews 11:13 puts it, "aliens and strangers on earth"—then we are better equipped to reach out to any and all whom we meet with the gospel of the one who came to us as the divine stranger to bless all the nations of the earth. It is, then, no surprise to find that the God who turned Abram into an immigrant in Genesis 12 so as to found a nation that would bless the whole earth would conclude his own revelation to us in the book of Revelation with a heavenly vision of "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9).

D. Theological reflections

As we conclude this section of our report, we will engage in some broader theological and practical implications based on the foregoing biblical considerations. Although there may be a certain degree of fluidity in what follows, it may be helpful on the practical front to break this discussion down into categories that focus on the church as a whole, on the role of the civil government, and on the role of individual believers as members both of the church and of the wider society. Finally, we will devote a little space to pondering what a passage like Romans 13 may have to say in this regard, particularly as Paul's words there are frequently quoted whenever a discussion arises that concerns the church and its relationship to the governing authorities.

1. The church

This summary and condensation of the biblical witness regarding the vulnerable strangers in our midst give us a consistent biblical framework in which to ponder the presence of migrant peoples in our midst also today. Biblically it is clear that unless a given person—no matter what his or her background or current social circumstance—threatens the faith or life of the Christian community, then that person is to be embraced and witnessed to in deeds and words that reflect Christ. The strangers in our midst represent opportunities both to discern the presence of Jesus

“Lord, when did we see you hungry. . . ?”—Matt. 25:37) and to act as Jesus in the name of the God who long ago told his people Israel that they were to love strangers because God loved them.

In addressing the need to welcome the strangers among us, the United States Catholic Bishops noted that this biblical insistence that we discern each person as an imagebearer of God worthy of our love led Pope Paul VI to note,

The Church can regard no one as excluded from its motherly embrace, no one as outside the scope of its motherly care. It has no enemies except those who wish to make themselves such. Its catholicity is no idle boast. It was not for nothing that it received its mission to foster love, unity and peace among men.

—*Welcoming the Stranger: Unity in Diversity*,
United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 2000, p. 20

It should be clear from the foregoing that the church today carries forward the love of God for the stranger as revealed in the Old Testament and the love of God for all the vulnerable strangers in our midst as incarnated by Christ Jesus the Lord in the New Testament. As such, the church can but repent anytime it finds itself excluding people from its fellowship, membership, and sacramental life for any reason other than sin, evil, or threats to the church’s very existence and teaching. The church has no enemies except those who openly declare themselves as such either by word, deed, or a combination thereof. And even when the church has such legitimate enemies, Jesus calls us to love them even if their hatred of the church extends to their active persecution of that same church. We are to bless even those who curse us and love even those who hate us.

If that constitutes our attitude toward genuine enemies, it goes without saying that the church must open its doors to all who come. It’s not the church’s job to establish a person’s worthiness to join the church or receive the sacraments based on any precondition other than the person’s heartfelt desire to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord. Again, if the biblical witness of both testaments is any indication, the church needs to go out of its way to make the life of Christ available to the most vulnerable people of all.

In this connection, the question could be asked: who today is more vulnerable than those persons who find themselves forced to seek a better life in a country where they have no standing and where most of the legal protections and social safety nets that the rest of us rely on are not available? Like Abraham in Canaan without a place even to bury his dead wife, so immigrants in the United States and Canada live with the constant fear of not being able to access what full citizens regard as the normal services and amenities of life: food, insurance, medical care, housing, and, yes, even a place to bury their dead. If ever there were a group in need of the embrace of a loving God and all the hope and joy that the gospel represents, it would be this group of strangers in our midst. In the setting of Old Testament Israel, these would be the very aliens to whom the passages in books like Leviticus and Deuteronomy would apply. In a New Testament context, one senses that such a marginalized and vulnerable group may have been among the first people to whom Jesus would have reached out in precisely the kind of inclusive love that offended his exclusivist-minded religious peers in the temple establishment of his day.

Certainly, as Paul knew so well, the gospel that is powerful enough to transcend the greatest social barriers of that time—the barriers between Jews and Greeks, males and females, slaves and free persons (cf. Gal. 3:28)—must likewise today transcend any and all barriers associated with the migrations of peoples, including linguistic, racial, socioeconomic, ethnic, and national barriers.

2. The government

Theological reflection in this area must in addition lead to ethical considerations that may not be obviously answered simply by appeal to the biblical summaries presented above. After all, a key feature of the contemporary landscape in the United States and Canada is not the question of immigrants in our midst but of people without status/illegal immigrants who entered the country in ways that were in direct conflict with the laws of the nation. Although the Bible has a lot to say about strangers and aliens from other lands, it does not address in any obvious way the status of such persons vis-à-vis the immigration laws of any given nation and so does not talk about a given stranger’s movement from one land to another in the terms of crime and punishment and border enforcement that we hear so often today.

As Peter C. Meilaender points out, in the modern world the governing authorities of a nation are certainly correct to establish laws that regulate immigration. Any given nation has a responsibility to its own citizens first and foremost, and so the government passes laws that protect its citizens from various forms of harm or danger and that regulate public life in prudent and wise ways. When pondering immigration law in particular, governments take into consideration issues such as availability of jobs and adequate housing for its citizens, how widely it is able to distribute its available services and resources, and other such practical considerations. It is not per se selfish for a government to take care of its own citizens ahead of the citizens of other nations, including care through immigration policies.

As Meilaender notes, we all exercise “preferential love.” Suppose you are the parent of two children. As a parent, it is not surprising that your own two children would receive more love from you—and stir greater feelings of protectiveness in you—than any other children you know or encounter. As a human being and as a Christian, you know you are obligated to protect any child you may happen to see on a playground or at a public swimming pool. If you spied a child in distress at the public pool, you would not fail to assist that child—nor calculate your relative interest in lending a hand—based on the fact that this was not *your* child. The presence of that child places undeniable obligations on you as a fellow human (and as a follower of Christ). Even so, these facts would not lead you to stand vigil at the side of the pool every day it is open, whether your kids were in the water or not. You will be there to watch your children but feel no obligation to be there every moment when other children are in the pool. Similarly you will work hard at your job and earn money with which you may be able to support a great many causes, some of which will benefit children other than your own, but your first obligation will be to make sure your own two kids are well-fed, well-clothed, and well-housed.

So also any given national government has obligations to all people—and only a truly insular and selfish country would never provide foreign aid or fail to provide troops for a peacekeeping mission that would help keep the children of other nations safe—but it only makes sense that the ruling authorities will structure its laws and allocate its resources in ways that will benefit its own citizens first. Even so, a wealthy nation should also structure itself—including on the immigration front—in ways that will help spread its wealth to others who may be from nations that struggle to provide for their own citizens.

3. Believers and advocacy

Churches are called to be hospitable to immigrants, but hospitality alone will not solve the myriad problems that plague the immigration systems in the United States and Canada. Because of this, Christian believers may well conclude that they need to take up their roles as advocates, talking with lawmakers in recognition of the fact that problems so entrenched can be addressed, long-term, only through the avenue of just laws and significant legislation. Christians are right to advocate for immigration policies within a given nation that will be more just, fair, and generous and that will assist the nation in welcoming more strangers as citizens, not fewer. But as has already been noted in this report, certainly in the United States, and to a degree in Canada, people everywhere are being forced to deal with the presence of millions of people without status already living in these countries. Many of these people are children and young people who were brought here when they were very young and who now find themselves stranded in difficult circumstances with few good (or legal) options.

As already noted, a civil government will have its own viewpoint on such matters in terms of crime and punishment. Christians in the church, however, should parse the situation from a different starting point: that of Christlike compassion for the person or persons who are already in our midst and who place an obligation on us by their very presence. Compassion requires trying to understand what led people to their present circumstances. Compassion also leads the church to realize that people who are already vulnerable on many fronts—and who lack so many sources of hope, comfort, or security—are in need of Jesus and of his gospel ministry in acute ways. To deny such people the nourishment of ministry based on a prior decision that those who “break the law” cannot receive grace until they first repent is to forget our common solidarity before God as lawbreakers and sinners who are all in need of mercy and forgiveness. As God reminded the Israelites, they were to treat the aliens in their midst with kindness because, *vis-à-vis* God, even the Israelites were aliens living on *God’s* land. The conclusion the Israelites were supposed to draw from this when faced with aliens was to say, “We are all aliens before God, so we should treat everyone with the compassion and mercy God has shown us.” Similarly in the church today we recognize that we are all sinners before God and therefore should show everyone the love and grace God has shown us. Recognizing this does not untie all the various knotty questions and issues we encounter here, but it may succeed in reframing the issue spiritually and theologically.

4. Romans 13

Before moving on to a few closing observations in this biblical-theological section of our report, we by necessity should ponder the implications of a passage that is routinely quoted whenever questions arise in connection with the church’s relationship to the governing authorities: Romans 13. As part of his larger address to the Christians living in Rome, the apostle Paul devoted seven verses to a plea that those Christians submit themselves to the governing authorities, obeying the laws of the land so that they need not fear the punitive arm of the authorities and paying taxes to the governing authorities as part of a recognition that all legitimate government officials are no less than the servants (Greek: *diakonoi*) of God himself. If a legitimate government appears to have legitimate claims for taxes, revenues, respect, and honor, then Paul says the Christian response is to render these things as part of their larger service to the God who has installed those authorities for the good of all.

A straightforward reading of Romans 13:1-7, therefore, would indicate that when a government passes laws—including laws governing the legality of a foreign person’s presence in the country—the church is obligated to follow that law and ought not be aiding or abetting those who may have violated the law in terms of how they entered the country or how they arrived at their present status in that nation. But before we too quickly allow Romans 13 to settle the matter when it comes to the church’s attitude toward and treatment of those who are in the country illegally, a few considerations should be observed in terms of how this text has functioned in church history as well as to the original setting of these words within the epistle to the Romans itself. What follows is by no means everything that could be brought into consideration when applying this text to the world today but may be enough to suggest that these verses by no means end the discussion of how the church deals with the law of the land in this connection.

First, whatever else Paul intended in these verses, it must be observed that even in the Roman context of the first century—not to mention subsequent historical contexts in the centuries to come—Christian obedience to the laws of the land was not an absolute requirement. If and when a government like Rome outlawed the Christian faith, outlawed worship services, or tried to regulate out of existence other distinctly Christian practices and beliefs, Romans 13 was not the Holy Spirit’s way of telling the church that it had to obey the government. Civil disobedience was always an option for the church when the laws of the government conflicted with the practice of the faith. There is even an irony to be observed in the fact that whatever else Paul’s words in Romans 13 may mean, they came to the Roman church in the form of a theological treatise that *itself* would have been considered by the Caesar as inflammatory if not illegal. Because contained within the theology of Paul’s epistle to the Romans are clear counterclaims to the Caesar’s assertion of being “lord and god” of the empire. Paul made clear that only Jesus is Lord, and he brooks no rivals. What we sometimes forget when hearing Romans 13 read in our churches today is that when this letter was first read to the Roman Christians in first-century Rome, the very reading of these words may have been an illegal act (or at the very least was an act that the governing

authorities would disdain). But had the governing authorities in Rome instructed the Roman Christians that Paul's letter to them had to be destroyed, it seems unlikely that Romans 13:1-7 would have become the reason for those Christians to burn the very letter that contains also these admonitions about obeying the authorities. Although it can be an acutely difficult matter to determine when the laws of the land are just and when they are sufficiently unjust as to warrant civil disobedience on the part of Christian believers, one thing can be said with certainty: Romans 13 has never ruled out civil disobedience once and for all.

Second, we cannot read Romans 13:1-7 in isolation from what precedes it in Romans 12. In it Paul calls on believers to be ready to present their bodies as "living sacrifices" because of a transformation of minds that would cut against the patterns of this world so as better to conform to the ways of God. Given Paul's soaring words in that first part of Romans 12, it would be difficult to believe that a few verses later Paul would undo this advice by telling these same readers that even if the patterns of this world—as enshrined perhaps in the laws of a given nation—were to conflict with the better ways of God's kingdom, believers nevertheless must conform to this world. Indeed, all through Romans 12 Paul holds out the highest law of all—the law to live by the rule of love—as the believer's truest vocation. But Paul is honest enough to admit that living against the patterns of this world may well lead to persecution, to the church's having enemies even to the point that the church will feel tempted to wreak revenge on those same enemies.

But Paul says no, it is better to suffer for what is right, to bless those who persecute, and to love even enemies because in all these ways the church will emulate the Lord and Savior who is the pioneer of the faith. Again, it is difficult (if not impossible) to believe that the same apostle who wrote all of that in Romans 12 would then in effect reverse himself by saying that vis-à-vis the governing authorities, all that Christian believers can do is go with the flow. Clearly Paul of all people knew that Christian believers are responsible to a higher law and to a divine pattern of behavior that will inevitably lead to conflict with even the very governing authorities about whom he writes in Romans 13. It may well be true, therefore, that Romans 13 represents advice to the church in the ordinary run of affairs over against governing authorities. Paul may even be indicating that God is clever enough to maintain the orderly function of this world through even unjust and corrupt governments such as the one that then existed in Rome. But recognizing that general principle and that general stand of the church over against the governing authorities by no means indicates that Christians have no choice but to be incessant compromisers of the truth, of the law of love, or of their highest commitment to the authority of Jesus as Lord.

The church has always known that despite the seemingly blanket advice proffered by Paul in Romans 13, Christian leaders and congregations are always obligated to examine the laws of any given time very carefully to ensure that the following of those laws is never done blindly but is always done with ongoing reference to the Lordship of Christ and to the highest calling of the Christian life to lead lives of forgiveness, grace, and love. Indeed, precisely this kind of ethical parsing has led to

countless acts of civil disobedience across the centuries as the church resisted those authorities who tried to stamp out the Christian faith or whose laws tried to wipe out or degrade whole segments of God's image-bearers. For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church in Germany resisted and actively disobeyed the laws of Hitler's Third Reich, and Martin Luther King, Jr., led the civil rights movement peacefully to resist unjust laws of the U.S. government that discriminated against people of color in a variety of ways, both subtle and overt.

On a historical and theoretical level, perhaps it is true that many, if not most, Christian believers would affirm that in any number of difficult or extreme historical circumstances vis-à-vis the law of the land, the proper Christian response is to protest or actively resist some of that national law. But even as many Christians in Germany did not agree with Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the need to resist the Third Reich and even as any number of churches in the United States did not agree with Martin Luther King, Jr., on the need to exercise civil disobedience against segregationist laws, so not everyone today will agree that an activist stance is necessary against current immigration laws and policies. As this conversation takes place across many different communities and congregations, it may well be that some will regard any breach in immigration law as a crime if not a sin, such that the church's best stance would be to help carry out the law of the land to punish and prosecute those guilty of legal infractions.

Thus, it may be worthwhile to ponder briefly the question of how to think about the situation of those who live without proper documentation in a country like the United States or Canada. Do those who exist in this circumstance live in some state of perpetual sin—a state that could be lifted only if they reversed course and returned to their homeland?

This is a delicate question fraught with complexity. However, we err if we conclude that the state of living without proper documentation represents a situation completely unlike any number of other situations that are present in the church community at any given time. We may or may not conclude that entering a country without proper documentation is sinful—in fact, a compassionate consideration of a given family's situation may lead us to recognize that their actions were not at all sinful, regardless of whether the government would view those actions as a civil infraction.

Even if someone wished to press the case that illegal immigration is a sin, it is not at all clear that the redress for it would be the undoing of the original set of actions (in this case, going back to one's homeland). Many things that we all do cannot be undone. Hence, if we claimed that participation in the kingdom of God cannot happen until everything we have ever done is completely reversed and repaired on the human level, few would be able to see themselves as kingdom citizens. A divorced person cannot become un-divorced (or at least we do not generally withhold ministry until and unless someone re-marries his or her original spouse so as to erase the status of "divorced" once and for all). The damage caused by those who used to be abusive in any manner toward a child cannot be undone—the child will live with those scars all his or her life, and that state of affairs cannot be erased. Sometimes we cannot reconcile with people with whom we had a falling out even if we ourselves genuinely want to do so. Some people die before we have a chance to say we are sorry, and

other people who still are alive refuse even to look in our direction, much less hear our contrition over what took place in the past, so we cannot repair the relationship in question—we all live with brokenness that will never be fixed. It seems, therefore, that we in the church would be theologically and spiritually myopic if we concluded that living in an ongoing state of being a person without status represented a unique situation.

We cannot deny that nation-states have a right to create and also enforce immigration laws as part of their responsibility to care for their own citizens. But we also cannot deny that however various immigrants came to be in our midst as church communities, their very presence as vulnerable persons without social standing activates the Bible's long tradition of providing love and compassion without requiring lots of calculations to see if a given stranger is worthy of our love or of the gospel ministry of the church. The church has no enemies except those who willfully declare themselves to be. And although we are right to take seriously the need for heartfelt repentance and a desire for the grace of Christ for all who would receive the ministry of the church and its sacramental life, we cannot define such matters in ways that would be different for one group than for others in the church. The moment we begin to try to determine such things, we forget the words of God to Israel long ago when he reminded Israel that they were no less aliens before God than any Canaanites, Egyptians, or Phoenicians who might be in Israel's midst. The moment we begin to draw lines and circles as to who is worthy of Christ's grace and who may not be so worthy, we forget the person, work, and gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was himself the stranger in our midst and who calls us to reach out first and foremost to those whom we encounter as strangers. As Jesus taught in the parable of the good Samaritan, it is less important to determine who "out there" is worthy of the designation "neighbor" than it is to make sure that *we ourselves* act as neighbors who embody the love of God in Christ wherever we happen to be.

E. Conclusion

When God called Abram to become the father of the faith and the source of a mighty nation that would one day bless every nation on the earth, his first order of business was to turn this stable and settled man into an immigrant wanderer. And when that man's descendants became numerous enough to qualify as a nation in their own right, they underwent a divine rescue operation from a situation of dire oppression that was supposed to sear deep into their hearts the need to be kind to all strangers from that time forward. And when the time had fully come, God sent his only Son into this world as an "outsider" in his own right but who, for that very reason, would teach us in word and deed that the heart of God remains fixed on loving all people, starting with those who are marginalized and on the fringes of our collective awareness.

These biblical and theological considerations do not provide easy or tidy solutions to the knotty questions that face the church, civil governments, and individual believers in the face of the current migration of so many millions of people. But they may succeed in reminding us that, from God's point of view, we all share more in common with our migrant sisters and brothers than we know and that we are called to do our best to love all people even as

we have been loved as we together journey toward that kingdom where all will be one. To again invoke the lyric words of the writer to the Hebrews:

By faith Abraham . . . was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. All these people were still living by faith when they died . . . and they admitted they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:11-16).

VIII. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mrs. Teresa Renkema, chair; Mr. Chris Pullenayegem, reporter; and Dr. Scott E. Hoezee, adviser, when the report on the migration of workers is discussed.

B. That synod recommend this report to the churches for study and discussion regarding issues surrounding the immigration of workers.

Biblical Affirmations

C. That synod declare that the biblical teachings and principles from both the Old and New Testaments as summarized in this report properly inform and guide the church's ministry to both status or non-status immigrant people, and that they affirm the following:

1. All people are created in the image of God and are to be treated as such regardless of circumstances under which the church encounters individuals or of a given person's race, background, or legal status.
2. God's Word consistently directs the people of God to be welcoming toward the strangers in their midst and to extend special care to those most vulnerable to social or economic conditions that threaten their ability to survive.
3. The church of Jesus Christ welcomes all who profess faith in him as their Lord and Savior and who desire to live for him. God has no favorites—true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition of membership in the church.
4. God's Word calls upon believers to respect the governing authorities and the laws of the state. However, citizenship in the kingdom of God obligates believers to the highest law of love for God and neighbor above all, and the exercise of this love should lead believers to advocate for laws that will mandate the just and humane treatment of immigrant peoples.

Education and Awareness

D. That synod instruct the Board of Trustees to encourage the Office of Race Relations to engage in, as a priority, a campaign to educate and raise cross-cultural sensitivity across our denomination and provide tools and resources

to denominational agencies, classes, and local churches to deal with cross-cultural conflict that may arise from time to time.

E. That synod instruct the BOT to encourage the CRC's relevant agencies to propose ways and to develop resources that will help in educating the churches and Christian schools by engaging in thoughtful study and discussion of the economic, political, social, and spiritual issues involved in the church's view of, and ministry outreach to, immigrant people.

F. That synod encourage local churches to educate their membership about the socioeconomic, political, and security issues facing immigrants and newcomers and equip them to respond in love and concern to these people groups that God is bringing into our nations.

Ground: The economic realities surrounding immigration and the presence of millions of documented and undocumented immigrants in the United States and Canada have created ongoing circumstances that already exist in many communities in which the church seeks to do ministry. This fact compels church members to educate themselves on the relevant issues already being faced by their various communities.

Advocacy and Justice

G. That synod instruct the Board of Trustees to encourage the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action and the Canadian Committee for Contact with the Government, in collaboration with their denominational and non-denominational partners, to engage in, as a priority, policy development and advocacy strategies that will lead to immigration reform and the enactment of fair, just, and equitable laws regarding those without status in Canada and the United States.

H. That synod encourage congregations and their individual members to speak out against, and seek to reform, laws and practices concerning the treatment of immigrants that appear to be unduly harsh or unjust.

I. That synod, mindful of the need for governments to create and enforce laws that protect the security and integrity of a given nation's borders, nevertheless encourage congregations and church members to support the need for comprehensive immigration reform in ways that will reduce the number of people without status and/or non-status workers and provide increased opportunities for immigrants to gain legal status within the nation.

J. That synod encourage congregations to advocate on behalf of those suffering in prison on account of their lack of status to ensure a more just and dignified process in dealing with them while also advocating for more humane treatment of those who are unfortunate enough to be imprisoned.

Ground: The governments of both the United States and Canada have been struggling with comprehensive immigration reform for years, recognizing that current policies are insufficient to deal with contemporary aspects of immigration. The CRC can be of service to these governments by speaking up for the just treatment of all people as part of the larger process to reform current laws and policies.

Ministry of Mercy and Compassion

K. That synod urge the Christian Reformed Church, through its assemblies and agencies, to affirm the need to reach out in hospitality and compassion to immigrant people and that synod further encourage churches to display this ministry concern through actions that include but are not limited to the following:

1. Prayerful study and discussion of issues related to the causes that motivate people to immigrate to other lands so as to deepen understanding of the circumstances under which many people live.
2. Mindful attention to the plight of both documented workers and people without status and to reach out in love to those who seek assistance for themselves and for their children in terms of financial assistance, food, clothing, and shelter.

Ground: Scripture calls us to be mindful of the plight of aliens and strangers, offering compassion and love in Christ's name to those who find themselves marginalized and in need.

Process

L. That synod affirm the sorrow first expressed by Synod 2007 over the alienation and misunderstanding caused by the processes that brought the original overture to Synod 2007 (*Acts of Synod 2007*, pp. 595-96) and, to avoid such hurt in the future, that synod direct CRC agencies, classes, boards, and committees to make every effort to ensure proper representation of the affected groups when issues are studied and discussed.

Ground: When the church discusses an issue without the benefit of hearing the voices of those most directly affected by that issue, confusion and hurt can, and usually does, result.

M. That synod encourage churches to engage as mission partners the evangelical congregations and ministries that are serving in immigrant communities.

Ground: Many newer and diverse congregations are ministering effectively in this field of service, and Christian Reformed people would gain much by being in fellowship with them as partners in ministry.

N. That synod declare that this report fulfills the study committee's mandate given by Synod 2007 and dismiss the committee with thanks.

Committee to Study the Migration of Workers

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Rose Dekker

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Teresa Renkema, chair

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Appendix A

Five Interviews with Dutch Immigrants to Canada

Interview 1—November 9, 2007

Hans and Jenny, a couple in their eighties, immigrated in the early 1950s.

1. What was your immigrant experience? Why did you come to Canada? Did someone sponsor you? Were you welcomed by an individual, the church, the community?

Jenny: We didn't immigrate, we *moved!* There were no houses in Holland.

Hans: After I returned from Indonesia in 1948, we couldn't find a house in Holland. We had been engaged since before I went to Indonesia. I asked Jenny if we could immigrate to Australia. She said yes; then I found out it was cheaper to go to Canada, even though at that time there was no financial help from the government, we paid it all ourselves. We had \$100.

The "field man" (a Dutch immigrant from 1948) signed for us to come and work on a farm in the area. We didn't ever intend to work for that particular farmer. We immigrated in 1951 and worked on a fruit farm for three years for a family from England; they were nice people.

Jenny: I had four years of English in high school and Hans knew some too, so it wasn't as hard for us as others. Three children were born while we lived in that house with no running water; but I had lived on a farm in Holland too, so that wasn't hard for me.

Hans: We bought this farm [where they now live] in 1955.

2. What role did the church, the pastor, and other church members play?

Jenny and Hans: In 1951 the first CRC in this area opened; everyone came. People with cars picked up others for church. People came from neighboring villages; they brought lunch and stayed all Sunday. We were all new immigrants, hardly any in this area arrived before World War II. So many people were immigrating in those years that the church grew very fast. Home Missions in Grand Rapids sent Adam Persenaire to minister to this Dutch immigrant group. He and his wife didn't know Dutch, but they did every odd thing that we needed help with. He was paid by the Grand Rapids office. He and his wife took us to the doctor, took us to the store, and helped us in every way. The people who had come from 1948 to 1951 had it harder. Many came in 1951 and 1952 and really supported each other. Sunday was the best day of the week. The church held things together. We came with little money but when we wanted to build a church, there was \$7,000 in the offering. People needed the church more than they do today. That connection was so strong; people needed each other.

3. What was your legal status?

Jenny: I don't know. Immigrant? We were here legally, but I don't know the name of our status. As soon as we were here for five years, we became citizens. We moved to Canada to stay. Not all Dutch immigrants became citizens; some never did.

4. How much were you involved in the community outside of the Dutch community? Were you accepted?

Jenny: We had no problem. We lived on the farm with the English family for three years. Our kids were born here. Most of our kids married within the Dutch immigrant community.

5. Reflect on the fact that you now hire migrant workers on your farm. What about the fact that they may not bring families and settle here? Contrast with your own experience.

Jenny: It must be horrible. Some send money home to family; some spend it all here. Jamaica requires them by law to send 25 percent of wages home to support their families. All of the Mexican women send money home to their families.

Interview 2—November 14, 2007

Now a widower, Jelle came to Canada in 1953 with his parents and siblings and his brother's girlfriend. His brother had previously immigrated.

1. What was your immigrant experience? Why did you come to Canada? Did someone sponsor you? Were you welcomed by an individual, the church, the community?

Jelle: My parents were in their forties when they came to Canada with their seven kids. I was 15 years old at the time. My father had worked as an engineer at a mental hospital, which he did not like, so he was ready to leave Holland. My brother was already in Canada. My mom didn't really want to immigrate, but two of her sisters had already gone to Canada, and she was afraid all of us would eventually go without her.

Jelle thought immigrating was a great adventure. The family was supposed to go by boat, but six weeks prior to their departure date they were offered transport on a plane going to Canada. They flew on a propeller plane, making stops in Ireland and Montreal. On the plane there was a fire that was put out but that caused his mother nightmares afterward. An uncle had arranged for them to work on a farm. His dad was paid \$100 a month and was provided a house to live in. Jelle and his siblings earned 30 cents an hour. His mom and dad never complained, but it was very hard on his mother: there was no running water; they had an outhouse, a wood stove to cook on, and an oil space heater. His brother married the girlfriend who had traveled with them within a week of their arrival.

2. What role did the church, the pastor, and other church members play?

There was a "field man" who was put in place by the CRC and who gave them hints on living in Canada. In some places the "field men" would pick up the Dutch immigrants right off the train—then they would get the immigrants to help build the new Christian Reformed church building in the community. On Sundays a panel truck would pick them up and bring them to the little white church in town. The minister was Wiebe van Dijk, who had followed Adam Persenaire. He preached, helped people find jobs and helped them go to the doctor, although he himself, unlike

Persenaire, was also a recent immigrant. Many immigrants got jobs at the General Motors (GM) plant, but they had to join the union. Christian Reformed people that joined the union at GM were not allowed to be elders in the church. Jelle joined Young Peoples society at church. They argued about a lot of things; even as teenagers they were very opinionated. Now he wonders why they were that way at such a young age. Church was really the only social thing they had. His future wife's family arrived in Canada in 1952. They were only supposed to go out to Young Peoples meetings, but they would skip and go to hockey games and the pool hall—usually with other immigrant kids. They were mocked as “DPs” (displaced persons), and when playing hockey once, a Canadian kid ran into Jelle and broke his Dutch ice skates strapped on his feet. One of his brothers fell in love with a Catholic girl. Both sets of parents were against it, and they broke off the relationship. Jelle still feels the parents were wrong to prohibit the marriage with the Catholic girl. The new church building was finished in 1954, and then the Christian school was built. A Reformed minister was interested in cooperating with the Christian Reformed congregation by having his church members join the school society, but the ministers from the U.S. that were influencing the immigrants at that time were very separatist in their outlook and didn't allow the Reformed church to be part of the school society.

3. What educational and career opportunities did you have?

Jelle took a correspondence course in English and first became a mechanic and then took courses to become an electrician. He had studied English for three years in Holland; after six weeks in Canada, his English “clicked.” His parents took free English classes for immigrants. He started working on the farm at fifteen. By rights he shouldn't have worked until he was sixteen, but he was glad to leave high school in Holland and did not want to go to high school in Canada. He preferred to train for trades. He worked at GM from 1954 to 1958, but he hated the monotonous work and watching the clock. By then his dad had started an electrician business, and Jelle took a cut in pay to work with his dad. He says he never looked back, some immigrants worked at GM all their lives, but he would have hated it, working on the line where there was noise, people smoking, and the time crawled. All the immigrant kids that worked at GM gave their paychecks to their parents to help the families, as Jelle did that first year as well. The other young workers had cars and had money to spend.

When he arrived in Canada, one of the local stores offered bikes for \$52—a dollar down and a dollar a week for a year. Jelle can't imagine why the owner let him ride off on a bike for one dollar! He had always wanted a bike in Holland but couldn't afford it. He faithfully paid the one dollar a week for a year until the bike was his.

4. What was your legal status?

The Dutch government encouraged them to go to Canada; they were given landed immigrant status on arriving in Canada and were obligated to work for one year on the farm that sponsored them. After five years his entire family became Canadian citizens. His wife became a citizen on her own, but her family didn't. The farmer changed Jelle's name to a

Canadian name. He says that wasn't right, and he went back to his Dutch name and insisted on being called that. You had to be healthy to come to Canada. There was no provincial health care back then. GM had health insurance, and he kept that and paid the premiums himself after quitting work at GM. Good thing, because his first daughter was born three months premature and needed hospitalization; that would have wiped him out.

5. How was it for your dad starting a business in Canada?

It was tough. The labor rate at that time was \$2 an hour. In 1958 his dad bought an existing business, and Jelle worked in that business. Later he took over for his father, and retired last year.

Interview 3—November 14, 2007

Hank and Riek, an immigrant couple in their seventies, retired from a flower growing business.

1. What was your immigrant experience? Why did you come to Canada? Did someone sponsor you?

Hank: I grew up in Nijmegen, which was bombed during the war. In the five years after the war there were no jobs, and the country was crowded. I went to school for the flower business and wanted to own my own business, which would be impossible in Holland. Working on a farm of an uncle during one of the summers, I met Riek, who later became my wife.

Hank was already planning to go to Canada, and Riek was fine with that. An organization of the church in Holland, called “Christian Immigration Central” helped with the immigration. They assigned groups of people to go to a certain city or area so that a church could be founded in that place in Canada. Hank was sent to Nova Scotia. There were no Christian Reformed churches in Nova Scotia, so a whole group of immigrants went there with the idea that they would start a church. He immigrated on May 8, 1953; the trip took eight days by boat. He had 10 guilders in his pocket. At 21 he would have gotten \$40 from the Canadian government when he landed, but he wasn't 21 yet so he didn't get any money. He came for adventure and new possibilities, not necessarily because he felt God calling him to come, but he gives testimony to how God was with him and Riek and their family through all the years in Canada.

He took a train inland from Halifax harbor and got off at a depot all by himself. The son of the farmer where he was to work was there to pick him up, not very happy about it because it was 2:00 am on a dark, cold, miserable night. Hank arrived at the house and was told to go upstairs to a room to sleep. He went up and wondered what in the world he was doing there, but he never had another night of homesickness. It was a Dutch Catholic family; he worked there awhile, but they really couldn't afford to pay him, so they found him work on another farm before the year was up. Hank didn't speak any English when he came, but he would go to the neighbors' every night to talk and talk. Little by little he learned English, which was taught as part of the curriculum of a local college. He would practice his lessons with the neighbors.

Riek: After meeting Hank, I saw him a few more times in Holland. We had a young people's retreat on a farm. The boys and girls slept on opposite sides of the barn. We got engaged one week before he left, and I came to Canada the next year, in April 1954. We had thirty days to get married by government regulation. We were living on another farm by then. On Sundays, we did the chores and then borrowed a car to go to church which was held in a Temperance Hall—although the immigrants had originally started out with services in people's houses.

They were living with the family until Riek got pregnant, and then they found an old farm house to rent with a hand pump by the sink, an out-house, and a wood stove, but Riek was used to that from Holland. Hank refused to turn hay on a Sunday.

That year Hank needed surgery on his leg. He waited until after harvest for the surgery, but then he was let go by that family. They moved to another town where there were more Dutch people and found a job with a man from the Netherlands with a huge farm.

2. What role did the church, the pastor, and other church members play?

A group of people met on Sundays for reading services. They lived forty miles away. Hitchhiking to and from church took most of the weekend. Later Rev. Ralph Bos showed up, sent by a church in Chicago as a home missionary. He took care of all the churches in the area: Kentville, Truro, Halifax, and the church on Prince Edward Island, so he only came once a month to their town. He'd baptize all the babies on that Sunday. After Bos left, a student from seminary came for a while. He preached in English. Deciding to switch to English preaching was a big deal and caused argument.

Riek: Sundays were the times we were together. It seemed like all the women were pregnant.

A ladies group was formed in the church, and they'd meet from Easter through Christmas, not during the winter. She was never homesick. Everyone was in the same boat. After church they visited with other families.

The church grew, and some non-Dutch families joined. One of them was the family of the Dean of the agricultural college, who was very English. They became great friends, and this man got Hank a job as a manager for a large carnation grower on the border of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, far from the Dutch community. It was 50 miles to the church in Truro, and they could only get there for the Sunday morning service; they attended a Church of the Nazarene at night. Meanwhile two of Hank's siblings had gone to Brampton, Ontario, and, wishing to be closer to family and Dutch community, they went to Ontario. They moved with six kids. After building an acre of greenhouses there, he heard of a job in Leamington, where they needed a finished product manager. They went there and lived right on Lake Erie in an old tobacco kiln—which had been rebuilt for human habitation. The closest church was Essex, 18 miles away. He was very involved in the Christian school society, served as elder, taught catechism; he was gone all the time for church responsibilities,

and he still regrets that he lost time with his family because of that. They stayed in Leamington for eleven years and finally came to the Niagara Peninsula, where Hank worked for someone else for a while. He then bought his own small greenhouse operation and changed the business from vegetable to flower growing—his dream from long ago in Holland.

Interview 4—November 23, 2007

A widow in her mid-eighties. We mailed the questions to her, and she responded by letter.

1. What was your family's personal experience of immigrating to Canada? Why did you come? Did someone in Canada sponsor you? Did someone welcome you to Canada? What year did you arrive?

The war made us ready to leave Holland, and Europe in general. I think that was true for most of us. After 1945 it took Holland several years to build up and repair the structure of society, as we knew it. Factories were in ruins, you could not buy anything, and no houses were available for new families. Jobs were scarce, and the future looked bleak for almost every segment of society. We were free—and very thankful for that—but there was such a shortage of everything that we needed as a young, married couple, that it was almost impossible to set up housekeeping. Many couples ended up living with their parents (we too). For families with children it was also very difficult to keep them clothed and well fed. Holland had been robbed empty by the Nazis and bombed by the allies, because every factory and all means of transportation were working for the German war effort.

Another factor in 1944 was the struggle in the Reformed churches. It made us want to leave the whole mess behind and start over in another country. My husband and I tried, and had contacts in the U.S., Quebec, Australia, and South Africa—anywhere. But Canada was the most inviting. The governments of Canada and the Netherlands had an agreement to promote the immigration of people with a background in agriculture. This was great for the farmers who were looking at their own country becoming too small and overpopulated to establish any more farms. Even the land reclaimed from the Zuiderzee could not fill the demand.

After Holland's liberation we developed a relationship with Canada and a longing to see that country where there was so much space and possibility. Canada itself was very active in promoting immigration, sending propaganda films, organizing conferences, etc. The Canadian Pacific Railway was very involved. The churches also helped, especially the Christian Reformed Church (Dutch roots), which was still very small in Canada but saw an opportunity to expand. Very soon there was a Christian Immigration Society on both sides of the ocean, and they kept close contact with each other.

To get the ball rolling for our own immigration, in 1949 we had to visit the Canadian Embassy in The Hague to get the approval of the Canadian authorities. We had to show we were capable of make a living for ourselves and would not become a liability to Canada. We needed to have a sponsor for the first year. We also had to pass a doctor's examination.

Families with handicapped children were not accepted. When all this was done, we had to get the money together to pay for the boat trip to Canada and for the transportation of our goods, which were loaded into large crates. We could not take money out of Holland because the monetary situation in the world was not stabilized. So we took whatever we had—furniture, clothing, and even a complete baby layette, as we were expecting our first child. Neither of the governments helped anyone financially in the late 1940s and early 50s. Later the Dutch government gave a subsidy to people who wanted to leave. Just imagine! There was a cartoon depicting the government waving goodbye to people on their way to Canada and welcoming, with the other hand, guest laborers from Morocco. Not much foresight in those days!

2. What role did the church play for you when you arrived and in your early years in Canada? The pastor? The congregation members? How was your first pastor assigned or called to your church?

Our need for spiritual support gave us a strong feeling of the need to have a church and Christian education for our children. Of course the ethnic factor played a strong role too. To get together on Sunday with your own people, hear a sermon, and sing in your own language was the highlight of the week. The CRC of Winnipeg helped us to organize. Their minister was A. Disselkoe, who came over very often to Thunder Bay. Home Missions helped also in the person of M. Dornbush from Portage la Prairie. Each of them often stayed in our home with us. Those first years we were like one large family. We all had similar circumstances and helped each other.

3. How much were you involved with the community outside of the Dutch community? Were you accepted by people outside of the Dutch community?

Were we welcome in Canada? Yes and No. Neighbors were mostly very good and helpful to us, but some confused us with other refugees like the people from Eastern Europe who did not fit easily into the Anglo-Saxon culture and had more trouble learning the language. They had lost everything and were called “DPs” (displaced persons). This became part of a cruel name calling, especially in the male labor world. As happens everywhere when there is a great sudden influx of foreigners, the people began to grumble that DPs were taking away jobs from Canadians.

Later, when we started our own church it was identified as the “Dutch Church,” and later still, the Christian school was always referred to as the “Dutch School.” People suspected that we had a clique mentality, a foreign implant into the Canadian culture. Would it have been better if we had just joined an existing denomination like the Presbyterian Church? I have often wondered about this. The CRC did not have much history in Canada, and we almost acted as if God never did anything here, as if we were the first bringers of the “True Church.”

After we started the Christian School in 1962, we lost all contact with the parents and children of the neighborhood public school, a fact that I still regret. Could we have made a better contribution to Canadian

society if we had supported them in what was good in their churches and schools?

4. What was your legal status when you immigrated to Canada? Did the Canadian government offer financial help to you or other Dutch immigrants to encourage you to come to Canada? Did you become citizens of Canada?

Our legal status was that of “landed immigrant,” with the understanding that after five years we could become Canadian citizens, which nearly all of us did. We wanted to be accepted very badly, but still separated ourselves spiritually, politically, and in education up to the highest levels. The government only helped with language courses, which most of us did not take for lack of time. We were too busy trying to make a living; the fathers of large families all had more than one job.

5. What role did the Dutch immigrant community play in your life, particularly in the early years?

The immigrant community consisted of singles, young married couples, and large families with several teenagers. The last group, the very large families, did very well and became the most prosperous. Their tactics were to find jobs for the young people in the family. Boys and girls were expected to bring their wages home and put them all in one pot. Very soon there was enough to make a down payment on the first family farm, where they continued with the same pattern. The young people had a very strong work ethic, and since they had stayed home on the farm in Holland during most of the war, they were more than happy to be part of this Canadian adventure. They also learned the daily language very fast without extra schooling. The result was that their language stayed at the elementary levels, but later they became the parents of the generation that branched out in all directions.

In Thunder Bay the majority of Dutch people came from the four Northern provinces of Friesland, Groningen, Drenthe, and Overijssel. Very few were from the west of Holland where the big cities are, or from North Brabant and Zeeland. Characteristics of these northerners were that they were very hard working, and very conservative, had strong family ties, and were independent decision makers, faithful church members, and straightforward (or blunt) in social situations—not very tolerant of people and things that were different; very opinionated but very strong in their commitment to church and school.

6. What was the role of the “field man”? How was he appointed to this position?

The heads of the Ontario Immigration Society discovered my husband’s gifts for making contact with the Canadian authorities, so they made him the “field man” for immigration for the district. His task was to find farms where help was needed and offer to them the opportunity to sponsor a Dutch family. Very soon he knew all the country roads and farms in the area and brought in several families from Holland. It was a challenging and sometimes frustrating occupation. If the Canadian farmer did not like the Dutch immigrant, it was the “field man’s” fault and vice versa. You

can well imagine how the people I described before often found fault with the farmer who sponsored them “who did not know how to farm” or did not stick to his promises. And the farmer was sometimes fed up with the “know it all” attitude of the immigrant.

Those first years were difficult for most families, but if I now look back over almost 60 years, I can see that the Lord was with us and led us through valleys and over mountaintops to a prosperous existence and made us an accepted, contributing ethnic group in the colourful multicultural make-up of our beloved country, Canada. Our children are totally Canadian but have their own convictions, many of which are based in the values, beliefs, and work ethic that we brought with us from Holland.

Interview 5—December 31, 2007

Based on the written story of Jack and Mary.

1. What was your immigrant experience? Why did you come to Canada? Did someone sponsor you? Were you welcomed by an individual, the church, the community?

My brother and I were in the building trades in Holland. After I returned from Indonesia, where I served with the Dutch army during the war, we wanted more freedom to work as we pleased. Also, I had been going steady with Mary for six years by then, and there were no houses, not even single rooms to rent in Holland. We decided to immigrate with my brother and his wife and small son. But my brother’s wife died suddenly, so we agreed to immigrate anyway and Mary would look after the little boy while we worked. We applied to come to Canada on our own. We didn’t know anything about a sponsor, and we wanted to keep it quiet that we were leaving because there were still some accounts owed to us in our business in Holland and we wanted the people to pay us. If they knew we were leaving Holland, they wouldn’t have paid. Mary and I got married, got passports, and received a visa. We thought a visa would tell us what to do about going to Canada, but it was only a stamp in our passports! Boats to Canada were full, so we flew to Canada for \$100 more per person. We landed in Iceland and then in Gander, Newfoundland, where we passed through immigration, then flew to Montreal. With no sponsor, no one was there to meet us, and we didn’t know what to do. We took the train to Toronto where the Department of Immigration advised us to go to Niagara Falls because carpenters were needed there. We took the train to Niagara Falls where another immigration official called a carpenter in St. Catharines, who asked if we had our own tools and knew English. We had our own tools, and I knew some English. We were hired on the spot.

2. What role did the church, the pastor, and other church members play?

The immigration official in Niagara Falls gave us the address of a Dutch minister in St. Catharines. We took the bus from Niagara Falls and went to his house on Geneva Street. Rev. Persenaire wasn’t home, but one of his daughters sent us to the home of another family from the church. We had supper with them, and they found a rooming house for us.

Every Sunday morning we were picked up for church in an old pickup truck. The church was hot and crowded. We sang hymns in English, but the preaching was in Dutch. The minister did a whole lot more than preaching. He and his wife helped newcomers settle in, find jobs, find housing, and took us to the doctor. There were jobs to be had, but housing was scarce as there were so many immigrants.

My brother and I started working as carpenters one week after leaving our business in Holland. We stayed at that rooming house for two weeks and then moved into a summer cottage for three months. Then we moved into an apartment, for which some of the church people gave us furniture and beds because our crate from Holland hadn’t yet arrived. The next year we bought an acre of land, paying cash, and built a duplex house on the property. The day we moved into our new house, hurricane Hazel struck, causing much damage in Toronto. We had just moved our last piece of furniture in when the hurricane hit. We were not hurt or damaged. My brother had asked his deceased wife’s sister to come to Canada and marry him, which she did. By the end of that year both Mary and she were pregnant. Our mother in Holland worried about us in Canada, so we paid for her to come and visit. She saw her two new grandchildren and moved into our newly built house with us, spending two weeks there before returning to Holland, assured that we were doing well in Canada.

3. What was your legal status?

We were encouraged by both the Dutch government and the Canadian government to immigrate to Canada. We became landed immigrants as soon as we arrived, and five years later we became Canadian citizens.

Appendix B

Interviews with Hispanic Immigrants

(Summary of Interviews with Mexican Immigrants in Northwest Iowa)

The questions used in these interviews were similar to the ones used for the interviews of Dutch immigrants in Canada. The interviewees were asked about their immigrant experience and why they came to the United States. They were asked if they had sponsors and whether they were welcomed by the church and their new community. They were asked what role the church played in their settlement and about their legal status in the U.S. Most of the people interviewed now have some type of relationship with evangelical churches. Below are summaries of the interviews, as well as information that the interviewer accumulated while working with Hispanic immigrants over the past few years. The participants in these interviews were all from Mexico, but the responses would be similar if they were from other Latin American countries. The participants were very willing to share their experiences and were pleased that the Christian Reformed Church is studying the immigration issue.

The immigrants’ experiences in entering the United States ranged from quite simple to very dramatic. It is obvious that it is much more difficult to enter the United States now than it was some years ago. A few people obtain tourist visas and then overstay their visas. Most people use the assistance

of border people (coyotes) to get across the border, which is very costly. In the past this was relatively easy and not very expensive. Now it may be a secretive one-night pass over a river, but more common is a three-day trip through the desert undertaken on moonless or cloudy nights. The days are spent hiding under bushes and trying to get some sleep. Immigrants can only carry a few things with them, of which the most important is water. One immigrant talked about his selfish unwillingness to share water with someone who needed some because he was afraid he might run out. Some compassionate people had placed jugs of water in the desert to help them, but they did not dare drink the water because they had heard stories of others putting poison in the water. Extreme heat and cold are common problems.

It is always hard to cross with children, especially young children and babies. One mother had to give up her two very small children to total strangers who took them across the border; she then met the children at a well-known fast-food restaurant. The same mother said she later heard of children killed at the border for their valuable organs. One person said he had an uncle who disappeared crossing the border. They talked about women being violated and about gang fights over money and clients related to border crossings. Often one member of the family will cross the border to find work and lodging; the rest of the family follows. It is not at all uncommon for a family to make multiple border crossing attempts before succeeding.

There are few work visas given out to Mexicans. People wait for years for these visas. Immigrants can also get a more permanent status under political asylum, abuse situations, pastoral positions, unique family situations, and (in some cases) when an employer can prove an immigrant can fill a position that he has had trouble filling. These cases usually involve a lengthy process and high costs, and are available to very few people.

The vast majority of immigrants come to the United States for economic opportunity. A number of the immigrants had jobs in Mexico, but the income from these jobs was not sufficient. One family said that their children could not attend government schools because they did not have money to buy the school uniforms and backpacks required for enrollment. Immigrant parents talked about their willingness to sacrifice so their children would have opportunities that they did not have.

Mexican immigrants do not have sponsors but often have a relative or close friend in the United States who will, at least initially, offer them food and lodging. Typically, once a job is secured, the new immigrants share housing costs until they can find and finance their own house or apartment. Immigrants often arrive with large debts associated with their trip. A family of three said they had a debt of \$9,500 when they arrived in Sioux Center, with the added financial burden of the mother being pregnant. The cost of hiring someone to help cross the border is about \$3,000 per person. The immigrants arrive not only without money but also without any possessions. They are forced to travel light; some arrive literally with only the clothes on their backs, and if they arrive in winter, without proper clothing.

In Northwest Iowa there are both community and church ministries available to new immigrants. There are two community ministries that work extensively with Hispanics, and there is a Spanish language church called "Amistad Cristiana," supported by many area churches, which offers

assistance programs for Hispanics. There are also a few churches that independently are starting small programs mainly with Hispanic children.

Assistance usually takes the form of food, clothing, home furnishings, and help with translating. Hispanic immigrants are very appreciative of the help they receive and quickly talk about how important it is to them. They are also very much aware of the discrimination and racism that exist. Members of evangelical churches are not immune to this. Non-profit organizations that are mentioned as helpful are Justice for All and Amistad Cristiana. Government-supported organizations such as Mid-Sioux and Women, Infant, and Children maternal health care program (WIC) were mentioned as providing help to their families.

Most Mexican immigrants do not arrive with legal papers. Those who try to get papers are often frustrated by the long, costly process. The immigration service is overworked and often offers confusing and at times conflicting information.

Immigrants, because of their undocumented status, look at law enforcement as both friend and foe. There have been cases in which immigrants who reported abuse or criminal activity to law enforcement have been arrested themselves because of their illegal status. A woman who was severely abused by her husband reported him to authorities only to find herself fleeing from the police because she was not documented. Another person said he wanted to report illegal drug activity to the police but knew if he did so his false identity would be exposed and he would find himself in trouble with the law. It is so important that all residents trust law enforcement, but undocumented people often have trouble doing that because of their immigrant status. A return to their homeland is not a good option for those who have sold their home in Mexico and now have children who have become accustomed to living in the United States and would experience many hardships if forced to return.

Mexican immigrants greatly appreciate the opportunities they find in the United States. These include higher income, education for children, medical assistance for American-born children, and an opportunity to financially support aging parents and relatives back in Mexico. A huge frustration is the difficulty they have in visiting family in Mexico because they cannot return legally to the United States. Immigrants often do not visit ailing parents or attend family funerals because of the border crossing situation.

There is a strong level of solidarity among Mexican immigrants. The majority have entered the U.S. under the same circumstances--without documents. A number have since obtained legal status by qualifying for Reagan's amnesty program during the 1980s. Marrying someone who has legal status in the United States has been a relatively easy way for an undocumented person to gain a more permanent legal status.

There are major differences between the immigrants from Mexico and those from Holland, who are the ancestors of many people in the Christian Reformed Church. It is important that we identify the differences so we avoid simplistic assumptions that all immigrants face the same challenges.

Appendix C

The Lighthouse Toronto: Our Work with Non-Status Immigrants

The Lighthouse started in 1968 as a diaconal ministry of the Christian Reformed Church. Initially its work was mainly focused on children's Bible programs in our neighborhood in Toronto. In 1981 we started the work of refugee settlement at the request of local Christian Reformed churches. Soon thereafter we made a special agreement with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee that enabled us to help Classis Toronto churches not only in the settlement of refugees but also in the sponsorship of refugees as well. Our work with refugee sponsorship has substantially decreased since the mid-1990s for a number of reasons. However, over the time that we have been involved in this program, we have been able to sponsor and settle around 1,000 refugees.

As many refugee claimants and new immigrants began to arrive and we became aware of the various needs of different groups, our work began to grow and expand. So by the mid-1980s we started the shift in the direction of becoming a community center. We have offered a large variety of services at different points in time, including settlement services to newcomers, family and individual counseling, trauma therapy to refugees, assistance to women fleeing violence, life skills training, support programs, family programs, English language training, community building programs, seniors programs, case management and advocacy, a food bank, an income tax clinic for low income clients, orientation and referrals, and spiritual support. Today we have five full-time staff committed to particular ministries serving the Vietnamese, Spanish, Chinese, and English speaking communities.

As a diaconal ministry our philosophy is to serve our neighbors in need in the name of Christ. We do this service without passing judgment on people, regardless of where they come from, what their lives are like, or their immigration status. Indeed, we have a particular commitment to serve people who are most vulnerable in society. The most vulnerable group of immigrants we served are non-status immigrants or persons who have overstayed a visa or received a negative decision on a refugee claim. Non-status immigrants face a high risk of labor exploitation; scams by immigration consultants; general violence, including violence against women; and no formal access to basic social services, including health and police protection. These immigrants live with severe emotional stress and in constant fear of deportation, which to them means losing everything they have at any moment, including their material possessions and the hope for someday living in safety. The fear of deportation and their vulnerability to all sorts of exploitation force them to live in extreme isolation with little support, and with little information to help them make good choices.

It would be a mistake to conclude that it would be better for non-status immigrants to go back to their home countries, rather than enduring the hardships that accompany living without status. Many of them migrated to Canada because of violence, danger to life, and economic hardship in their country of origin. In fact, many of them made a refugee claim but were given a negative decision. This is due to different factors: deficiencies in the refugee system in the way they understand how people of different cultures are impacted by trauma, shame, and fear; the inefficiency of lawyers and

immigration consultants to have adequate knowledge and time to build a good case; and the refugee's lack of knowledge to navigate the system. Once denied, refugees are given a deportation order, which means they must leave the country by a specific date. If they do not leave on the assigned date, a warrant for their arrest comes into effect. As a result, they go into hiding. This still means that if they are, for example, asked by the police to provide identification as a witness to a crime, or when they are looking for a criminal who happens to look like them, the police may find out there is a warrant for their arrest. They will immediately be detained and threatened with deportation. Under these conditions of insecurity and danger they have no other option but to live underground, what a non-status person called "living in the shadows."

It is believed that approximately 200,000 to 400,000 non-status people live in Canada in the major cities of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. It is also believed that the majority of non-status people live in Toronto. We are seeing an increasing number of clients in this situation, and we notice the negative impact this life has on individuals and their families. Since it is extremely difficult for non-status people to access community services available to the general population, a number of community workers have created networks of support dedicated to offering limited services underground, which are provided by referral. The Lighthouse is part of this network. To ensure non-status people feel safe coming to our center, we are very careful and flexible about asking for identification from our clients. They have access to all our programs, as mentioned earlier, but tailored to their particular needs. In our experience, this means providing all of the above but with more home visits, providing orientation and information about immigration programs and other practical information pertinent to their survival, doing more advocacy, and providing more continuous support. We believe that we also need to go beyond providing direct services to clients and participate in the process of structural change. For this reason, we participate in community campaigns and activities that promote the rights of non-status people in the community, and we work for immigration policy changes.

Appendix D

Narratives of Non-Status Immigrants in Canada

Josefina's Story (January 2009)

Josefina is married to Mario, and together they have three children ages fourteen, eleven, and two. Her last child was born in Canada. Josefina and her family came to Canada ten years ago. They left Mexico because her oldest daughter, who was three years old at the time, had been kidnapped. They went to the police, but the police refused to do anything about it. They went to the human rights officer, who told them they were not going to get anywhere because of how the Mexican legal system worked.

They then decided to try to come to Canada. After finding out about the option to make a refugee claim, they decided that was the best way to go. It took about three years for their case to be heard. Unfortunately, they received a negative decision. A year later they had a deportation order, and they had only two weeks to pack their bags, give away their possessions, and return

to Mexico. They did not want to go back to Mexico for fear of the people who tried to hurt their daughter and because they felt their economic opportunities were very limited. They then decided to stay, hoping they could find a way to legalize their papers. Josefina and her family are Christians and have a deep faith and hope that God will answer their prayers and give them permanent resident status. This is what keeps them from falling apart.

Josefina started coming to The Lighthouse right after they came to Canada in 1999. She initially came with her children to a family summer camp that offered a number of recreation and life skills opportunities for newcomer and refugee families. Right after that, Josefina started counseling and therapy to help her deal with the trauma of the kidnapping of her child. In the meantime she had found a lawyer, but he was too busy to deal with her case.

At The Lighthouse we use a holistic approach to our service delivery: it includes the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions of well-being. We observe the person, the family unit, and the social/economic context when people come for help. This allows us to see a bigger and clearer picture of what the problem is and how we should address it. In the case of Josefina, we were able to help her deal with the legal aspect of her case, including meeting with her lawyer and helping her prepare for her refugee hearing. She and her family continue to participate in several family camps, Christmas programs, and counseling for the whole family. They benefit from our food bank, especially now with Mario's precarious employment from which he is often sent home without pay when his boss does not need him. We are working together with a lawyer to complete an application for permanent status based on a humanitarian and compassionate review. An application such as this takes an average of three years to process, and they might still be rejected.

After they lost their immigration status and became non-status immigrants, (undocumented) their lives changed radically. They could no longer live in their home, and their children had to change schools. They had to leave their secure jobs and find work where they were paid cash. Several times Mario has been exploited and not paid for his work. They live in constant fear of detention and deportation. The children live with the heavy burden that if they get in trouble with friends or the school system, their family could be deported; they must behave like perfect children.

At The Lighthouse we continue to assist this family as they have full access to all our programs without any requirements for immigration status. Josefina is one of our volunteers who come on a regular basis to help in some of our programs. She is a very compassionate person who enjoys serving and helping anyone in need. This is one of the very few places where people without status feel safe. They know they can talk to us freely and we will not judge them. After all, everyone has the right to live with dignity, and parents need to know their children are safe and well provided for. As a Christian community center it is our duty to serve, especially those most in need, as if we were serving Christ himself.

Hilda and Roberto's Story (January 2009)

Hilda and Roberto and their son, Carlos, came to Canada thirteen years ago from Chile. While in Chile, Roberto had refused to join a political party that he opposed. In order to protect his own safety and that of his family,

they decided to migrate to Canada. Roberto came first, and a few months later Hilda and Carlos arrived. They immigrated to Montreal. Roberto made a refugee claim upon his arrival, and Hilda and Carlos were later included in that claim for protection. This family became born again Christians a few months later and became very involved in their church community. They admired and respected their pastor, who took an interest in them. When this pastor found out about the refugee claim they made, he advised them to talk to a consultant with whom he was very close. Without any hesitation they and their pastor went to see this consultant, who recommended they abandon their refugee claim and make a skilled worker application. He promised they would get their permanent resident status since the Prime Minister of Canada had given him permission for a few families to get their status. In the meantime he was going to place them on a chicken farm outside Montreal to do some work. They worked there for a few months. He told them they needed to pay him \$10,000 within a year. He also advised them a few months later that they needed to move to Toronto because it had a more flexible immigration office. Every time they went to see this consultant their pastor went with them and assured them he was a Christian man who cared for others. He also told them not to tell people outside the church about it since this help was only given to Christians from his church. Hilda and Roberto did not hesitate to trust their pastor, and for the next year they worked three jobs each in order to make that money to pay this man.

They moved to Toronto and found another church there that was very supportive. A year later, Hilda came to The Lighthouse, where she started doing volunteer work. After paying the money to their consultant, they asked several times for an update of their case. The consultant insisted that everything was working well and the papers could come any time. After a few years of this, this man disappeared and the pastor left the church with criminal charges for stealing money. Hilda and Roberto suffered the biggest disappointment of their lives when they found this out. They also felt completely deceived and abandoned, and now they did not know what their status was. They found out soon after that their consultant had not submitted their application to the immigration office, which meant that they were totally without status. Things could not get any worse.

Hilda continued to volunteer at The Lighthouse and, in this critical moment, found friendly people who offered her advice, comfort, and support. They also found a medical clinic to help her and her son with their asthma, which was acting up because of this new and overwhelming stress. Roberto had taken a job using his old social insurance card, thinking he could still work legally. From this moment on everything changed. They had to move, find a different school for Carlos, and live with the fear of being deported, a feeling they had not had until that time.

Months and years went by, and their situation continued to be uncertain. The Lighthouse was a safe place for them to be and a place where they could continue doing volunteer work, getting updated information about possibilities for getting papers, and getting counseling. In 2006 Roberto was apprehended by the immigration authorities while coming back from work. He was detained, but this time he received a blessing in disguise. Since their refugee claim had been abandoned, they still had the chance to qualify for a PRRA (Pre-Removal Risk Assessment). At The Lighthouse we immediately

found the right lawyer that could work with them to make the PRRA and an application for humanitarian and compassionate review. We also made a petition that was signed by many people asking the government to let them stay. Less than two years later they got their permanent resident status, an occasion that brought much joy and happiness to them and to all of us who had watched them suffer. I am happy to say that after thirteen years of not being able to visit their family, and having no possibility to be with their sick parents, or to bury Hilda's father, finally in January of 2009 they were able to visit their native country of Chile. We have celebrated and thanked God for this family and for their new status as permanent residents in Canada. This is but a legal recognition of what they have already demonstrated, a family committed to live as good citizens of this country.

Appendix E

A True Story Happening Now (November 2008: As We See It)

by María N. Rodríguez de Vásquez

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It is Saturday, a beautiful early summer evening. Ruth is in the kitchen preparing spaghetti for her children, her husband, Danilo, is at church at a prayer group meeting, and the children are sitting and talking at the table while waiting for their food to be ready. Laughter fills the house that has witnessed all the joys, blessings, and sickness of this typical family. A setting for disaster.

This is the end point of what began more than twenty years ago, when Danilo and Ruth, a young Central American couple, decided to emigrate to "El Norte" because of danger in their home country. Some of Danilo's brothers, uncles, and cousins, who at that time worked for their country's government, had been murdered by the opposition. One day Danilo received a phone call telling him that if he did not leave the country, he would be next. That same night he and Ruth left home and crossed the border into Mexico. There, even though illegal, they were able to work. Danilo did all kinds of jobs while Ruth studied to be a hair stylist. They could not communicate with anyone in their home country, however, since the threat there could follow them to Mexico.

Ten years passed before an opportunity arrived to travel to the United States. Ruth and Danilo knew of the horrible journey awaiting them, but the allure of a safe place where they could be free and prosper as a family was very strong. They ended up crossing the Rio Grande in an inner tube, which was especially frightening because Ruth did not know how to swim well. In addition, Ruth was beautiful and predators were always lurking, so Danilo had to protect her from being raped while also watching his own back.

Crossing the river was only the beginning of a physical and emotional ordeal. The coyote they were paying as a guide led them through the desert night after night, while they spent their days sleeping out of fear of capture. Food and water were scarce. The only thing that kept them going was their confidence in their heavenly Father. He would protect them, and if they died they would go to heaven to live with him.

Danilo and Ruth were aware that in entering the United States they had broken the law. Yet life was good. They had three beautiful children who were born U.S. citizens. They had good jobs, their own home, a wonderful church family—best of all, no fear of being murdered. They lived quietly and saved as much as they could. They sent their children to Christian school and drove them to sports practice, plays, and sleepovers like any other parents do. The only difference was the nagging fear of being detained and having to depart the country at a moment's notice. They did not know what would happen to their children then.

Over the years Danilo and Ruth hired various lawyers who did not do their jobs properly and instead ended up harming their prospects for legalization. Some entered wrong dates on the application for legal immigrant status. Others just took the money for application fees without submitting the application. Some have since been disciplined or disbarred. All along, Danilo and Ruth were unaware of what they were signing because their English was deficient; they had to trust their lawyers.

Disaster struck that Saturday evening last May. Immigration officials came to their home. Ruth was pulled out of the kitchen and handcuffed, her ankles chained so she would not run away. She was pushed into a van. Her children cried, not understanding what was going on except that their mother was being taken away from them. Danilo was at a church prayer group.

Ruth was introduced to the indignities of jail, American-style. She had to take off her clothes and wear an old, stained, orange uniform. Worse, a shy and modest woman, she was not allowed to wear any undergarments for three weeks. An excellent mother and wife, she has suffered keenly the separation from her husband and children. When the children visit, they may not even touch her. She has to look at them through a thick glass and talk on a telephone that makes sounds barely audible. Ruth lives in fear of never hugging her children again.

Ruth's deportation back to Central America has been halted; however, she is still in jail and only God knows how long. A lawyer has been hired to see what can be done. Ruth's heart aches for her children and for the many others like her that are living in similar difficult situations. What keeps this family together, even though they are physically apart, is their faith in God. They believe that he will touch the hearts of those in charge of looking over their documents, leading them to a just and merciful decision. She knows many American Christians are with her. Better that she doesn't know how many are not.

Note: María N. Rodríguez de Vásquez is assistant professor of Spanish at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The names in this story have been changed to protect the characters' identity.