



KANSAS AREA – BISHOP SCOTT JAMESON JONES

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

9440 EAST BOSTON SUITE 160, WICHITA, KANSAS 67207-3603

TELEPHONE – (316) 686-0600 FAX – (316) 684-0044

kansasbishop@kswestumc.org

Statement from Bishop Scott Jones on Immigration Legislation  
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“Two crucial principles, both basic to the Bible and American values, are at stake in the current immigration debate,” said Bishop Scott J. Jones on April 5. “We must find a way to be true to both principles while always emphasizing compassion and hospitality.” Jones’ complete statement was publicized through United Methodist communication channels in Kansas and in letters to members of the Kansas legislature and the congresspersons and senators representing Kansas in Washington.

“Many different proposals are being considered in state legislatures and the Congress, and Christians should make their voices heard on the issues.”

Jones is the bishop of the Kansas Area of the United Methodist Church and leads 700 congregations and 170,000 members in the state.

**Text of Full Statement**

Two crucial principles, both basic to the Bible and American values, are at stake in the current immigration debate. Our political leaders must consider both hospitality and legality in the current debate. Nevertheless, we must always emphasize compassion and care for persons both because they deserve it and as commitment to a better future for all.

First, how do we best welcome newcomers to our land? America is a land of immigrants. Most of us are either newcomers or descendents of persons who came here from somewhere else. The beauty of our country is the mix of persons from all of the other continents. Many passages in the Bible command Christians to practice hospitality to newcomers, but none is so forceful as Matthew 25:35 where Jesus said, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me. . . . Just as you did it to the least of these you did it to me.”

Second, how do we respect our laws? We are a country of laws and respect for law is crucial to our way of life. Scripture also commands us to respect authority and obey them. We are a nation shaped by the rule of law. An economic and demographic situation that creates millions of persons who are not able to live with the full protection of the law is both unjust and Yet, we are in a situation today where more than 11 million persons reside in the United States illegally. Most of them have come because they or their parents want to work. Our economy depends upon their labor in many different ways, and they are contributing to the economic well-being of our country. Employers in industries like construction and agriculture cannot find employees without resorting to immigrants. The laws we have do not reflect the demographic and economic reality of our country.

The deciding factor in this is a moral attitude. Christian teaching states that God blesses diversity and commands us to welcome the stranger. Newcomers to our country are enriching our communities and our state with new energy, new traditions and new opportunities for a richer and more diverse way of life. New immigrants are helping to make America a better place, just as they have always done. Changes are stressful for many persons, but we must resolutely follow our American and biblical values.

Therefore, I call on our political leaders to think about legislation with the following in mind:

- Do not criminalize Christian conduct of helping needy persons. Throwing ministers and church workers in jail for caring for people will only worsen the problem.
- Devise a method to help illegal immigrants continue making their contribution to our country either through a guest worker program or a clear path to citizenship.
- Restore the integrity of our legal system by adopting rules that are realistic and enforceable.
- Maximize opportunities for education for all persons to help them become the best possible contributors. Thus, children of illegal immigrants should be given the same educational opportunities and scholarships as others.

For more information contact

Rev. Bob Harder, Special Assistant to the Bishop on Public Issues, 785-272-8726,  
rharder6@cox.net

Or Ms. Lisa Elliott Diehl, Director of Communications, 316-684, ldiehl@kswestumc.org