

*A Resolution of the Church of the Brethren Mission and Ministry Board  
March 2026*

## **Walking Together: Immigration, Peacemaking, Conscience, and Supporting Our Neighbors**

*“I was a stranger, and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:36).*

### **Care for immigrants and refugees is an essential part of the Christian and Church of the Brethren ethic of service and peacemaking.**

As followers of Jesus, the Church of the Brethren has long considered service to others to be a foundational part of our beliefs. This call to serve others is not limited to a few but extended to all. Scripture repeatedly tells us that we are to love, show hospitality to, and not mistreat foreigners (Deuteronomy 10:18–19, Exodus 22:21, Hebrews 13:2) and that immigrants should be treated the same as native-born residents of any land (Leviticus 19:33–34, Leviticus 24:22, Numbers 15:15–16). Migration also is foundational to the biblical story, seen in the migration of the Israelites from Canaan to Egypt and in the experience of Jesus as a refugee in Egypt to escape political violence. It is clear that empathy for and support of immigrants, migrants, and refugees are part of biblical teachings.

The Church of the Brethren has historically connected the call to serve others to include caring for immigrants and refugees. In a 1982 resolution, the church stated, “The primary truth of faith as we consider immigrants and refugees today is that Christ has made another appearance among us, as Himself an immigrant and refugee in the person of political dissidents, the economically deprived, and foreigners on the run.” The Church of the Brethren has carried out this belief through work with organizations like Church World Service to resettle refugees in the United States, by opening direct community service programs to immigrants in congregations’ local communities, and through advocacy to the United States government on behalf of a more humane and welcoming immigration policy.

This service to immigrants and refugees has been a consistent and long-term position of the Church of the Brethren. For example, members have worked to care for refugees after World War II, and the church advocated for greater US support for refugees as a result of the Vietnam War (1979 Statement: Action in the Refugee Crisis of Southeast Asia).

Currently there is a worldwide refugee and migration crisis, with many causes of migration including war, civil conflicts, criminal violence, climate change, and international and national

economics. The Church of the Brethren has treated immigrants who migrate for any of these reasons as deserving of support.

**Church of the Brethren history and tradition include radical discipleship, conscientious objection, and participation in civil disobedience.**

In cases where government policies are unjust or conflict with biblical teachings, the Church of the Brethren has supported individuals to follow their conscience and, in some cases, has encouraged open, nonviolent civil disobedience to such laws. One longstanding example is the church's support of conscientious objection to war.

Rooted in the Brethren belief that all war is sin, the Church of the Brethren has declared that, "We, therefore, cannot encourage, engage in, or willingly profit from armed conflict at home or abroad. We cannot, in the event of war, accept military service or support the military machine in any capacity" (1970 Statement on War). The church has considered a wide range of actions as part of nonparticipation in war, including conscientious objection to the military draft, nonpayment of taxes for military expenditures, and divestment from private companies that produce military weapons.

In some cases, nonparticipation in acts that violate our conscience and beliefs may include disobeying the law. In previous Annual Conference resolutions, the Church of the Brethren has taken up the question of civil disobedience. The 1969 Annual Conference statement "Obedience to God and Civil Disobedience" explains that, "While the state may demand reasonable loyalty from its citizens, it must not demand absolute obedience, which belongs to God." The statement also offers consideration for how faithful civil disobedience should be carried out, explaining that it should be "thought through carefully, prayed about, and fully discussed" among the church. It also suggests that Christians who engage in civil disobedience should openly explain their reasons for doing so to others and that "the emphasis of the action should be upon faithfulness to God and the affirmation of clear moral issues rather than upon the negation of law and civil disobedience as an end in itself."

In all cases, the church has not treated civil disobedience lightly, but considered potential consequences and noted that not all members may be of one mind about what level of risk to assume (1973 Statement: Non-Cooperation).

The Church of the Brethren has previously applied the concept of civil disobedience to immigration law. In a 1989 statement on churches providing sanctuary for refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Haiti, the church responded to what it considered to be unjust immigration policies. The Annual Conference stated that, "The use of the church as sanctuary is

consistent with obedience and faithfulness to Christ's will and way" and endorsed churches providing sanctuary to immigrants when lawful means of protecting their rights were exhausted, though doing so would potentially result in legal consequences.

Historically, when immigration law was inconsistent with Christ's teachings, the Church of the Brethren has accepted civil disobedience in the form of providing sanctuary as a reasonable and, in some cases, necessary response. Today, there are many legal ways in which members of the Church of the Brethren can and have supported their immigrant neighbors. However, in cases where such actions are portrayed as against the law or if laws change moving forward, civil disobedience may be the faithful response.

### **Faithful civil disobedience is grounded biblically and theologically**

Civil disobedience is the peaceful act of refusing to obey laws or policies that oppose God's justice and love, carried out prayerfully and with willingness to accept the consequences. It is rooted in discipleship, conscience, and love for neighbors, not in anger or rebellion.

Among the many biblical examples are Jesus' acts of nonviolent witness including Matthew 5 through 7 (nonviolence, enemy love, truth-telling) and John 18 through 19 (Jesus resists unjust power through truth and suffering love). The lesson of the New Testament is that Christian resistance mirrors the cross—firm, nonviolent, and redemptive.

The historic witness in the Christian tradition includes the witness of Martin Luther King Jr., whose leadership in the Civil Rights struggle can be encapsulated in his groundbreaking "Letter from Birmingham Jail" articulating nonviolent civil disobedience rooted in Christian love and the distinction between just and unjust laws.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who personified costly Christian discipleship under Nazism, demonstrated moral responsibility in the face of evil.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, Dorothy Day illustrated the power of radical hospitality, poverty, and resistance to unjust laws through community practice.

These and many other Christian witnesses affirm that civil disobedience is not rebellion for its own sake; it is an act of discipleship to Jesus Christ when conscience, scripture, and love of neighbor demand action.

In the Church of the Brethren tradition, civil disobedience is carried out only after discernment that seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Often, for Brethren, such discernment is carried out in

the context of the faithful congregation. The Church of the Brethren has historically emphasized community discernment as civil disobedience is considered a faithful action in service of the peace witness (nonviolence, conscientious objection) and toward the goal of standing with marginalized neighbors. Simplicity and humility have been helpful postures as Brethren discern the call to civil disobedience.

### **Support for newcomers and respect for God’s love for justice are reaffirmed.**

“The Lord executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:18–19).

“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:33–34, NIV).

We reaffirm that the church’s care for immigrants and refugees is not optional, but a core Christian ethical commitment rooted in love of neighbor, justice, and faithfulness to Christ.

### **Calls to action**

#### **For individuals:**

##### **Learn and listen**

- Read immigrant and refugee stories.
- Listen with humility and respect.
- Learn about cultures, histories, and experiences.

##### **Speak with care**

- Challenge harmful stereotypes with truth and grace.
- Use language that honors dignity.
- Share accurate information with compassion.

##### **Show up consistently**

- Volunteer regularly, not just once.
- Accompany families when invited.
- Build relationships rooted in trust.
- Understand that civil disobedience may be necessary.

#### **For congregations:**

##### **Pray and reflect**

- Pray for immigrant families and communities.

- Include immigrants in congregational prayer.
- Reflect on the biblical call to welcome the stranger and to work for justice.

### **Offer welcome and support**

- Greet and acknowledge immigrant neighbors.
- Help with forms, school questions, or appointments.
- Offer rides, childcare, or translation, when possible.
- Understand that civil disobedience may be necessary and support church members who prayerfully participate in such actions.

### **For districts:**

#### **Give resources**

- Donate food, clothing, school supplies, or gift cards.
- Support trusted local and national organizations.
- Share resources collectively for greater impact.

#### **Bear the cost**

- Accept inconvenience, misunderstanding, or criticism.
- Share power, space, and leadership.
- Remain faithful when support requires sacrifice.
- Understand that civil disobedience might be necessary and support congregations' prayerful participation in such actions.

### **For the denomination:**

#### **Advocate courageously**

- Speak up when policies harm families.
- Contact leaders and institutions respectfully.
- Use voice and position to act for justice.

#### **Stand in solidarity**

- Be publicly supportive of immigrant communities.
- Attend prayer services, vigils, or community gatherings.
- Choose presence, even when uncomfortable.
- Understand that civil disobedience might be necessary and support parts of the denomination, including staff, who prayerfully participate in such actions.

### **For reflection:**

- Annual Conference statements on peace and justice.
- The 2007 “Separate No More” Annual Conference paper (on racism and unity).
- Church of the Brethren positions on immigration, refugee support, and nonviolent action.

We acknowledge that standing with immigrants and refugees in today's political and cultural climate carries heightened risks and real consequences, yet we commit to walking this path with prayer, wisdom, courage, and mutual care. We trust in God, who empowers and sustains people of faith in their discipleship to Jesus Christ.

**A prayer for the journey\***

God of all people, open our eyes to see our immigrant neighbors, open our hearts to listen to them deeply, open our hands to serve them generously, open our lives to walk together with them in love, and give us the courage to do what is right, even if it means resisting the laws of the day. Amen.

**Spanish:**

Dios de todos los pueblos, abre nuestros ojos para ver, nuestros oídos para escuchar y nuestros corazones para amar a nuestros vecinos inmigrantes. Amén.

**Haitian Creole (Kreyòl):**

Bondye tout pèp yo, louvri je nou pou nou wè, louvri zòrèy nou pou nou koute pep la, epi louvri kè nou pou nou renmen vwazen imigran nou yo. Amèn.

**French:**

Dieu de tous les peuples, ouvre nos yeux, nos cœurs et nos mains afin que nous marchions fidèlement avec nos voisins immigrants. Amen.

**Hausa:**

Ya Allah na dukkan al'umma, ka buɗe idanunmu, zukatanmu, da hannayenmu domin mu yi tafiya tare da 'yan ci-rani cikin kauna. Amin.

**Hindi:**

हे सभी लोगों के परमेश्वर, हमारी आँखें खोलें कि हम देख सकें, हमारे हृदय खोलें कि हम प्रेम कर सकें, और हमारे कदमों को मार्गदर्शन दें कि हम अपने प्रवासी पड़ोसियों के साथ चलें। आमीन।

Signed

Mission and Ministry Board chair and chair-elect, or the full board

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## References

Statement on Undocumented Persons and Refugees in the United States, 1982,  
<https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1982-refugees/>

Resolution: Action in the Refugee Crisis of Southeast Asia, 1979,  
<https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1979-refugee-crisis-se-asia/>

Statement on War, 1970, <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1970-war/>

Statement on Obedience to God and Civil Disobedience, 1969,  
<https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1969-obedience-to-god-and-civil-disobedience/>

Statement on Non-Cooperation, 1973, <https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1973-non-cooperation/>

Resolution: Providing Sanctuary for Latin American and Haitian Refugees, 1983,  
<https://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1983-latin-haitian-refugees/>

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*\*This resolution is offered in English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Hausa, Hindi, French, and other languages as needed. The closing prayer in all the languages will be included in each of the translations.*