



For Immediate Release  
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## **Christian Faith Leaders Call for Understanding on Immigration before Thanksgiving Holiday**

*Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform Release Report “A House Divided: Why Americans of Faith Are Concerned About Undocumented Immigrants”*

Washington, DC – Today, Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, joined by Rev. Jim Wallis, Founder and CEO of Sojourners, Most Reverend John Wester, Bishop of Salt Lake City, Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration, Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and James Winkler, General Secretary of the United Methodist Church, General Board of Church & Society, called on Christians across the country and people of good will to remember the place of immigrants in our country and in our history as people of faith. Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CCIR) is engaging faith leaders in an effort to reframe the immigration debate with a stronger moral imperative.

CCIR, a coalition of Christian organizations, churches, and leaders from across the theological and political spectrum that are united in support of responsible immigration reform, will release a report “*A House Divided: Why Americans of Faith Are Concerned About Undocumented Immigrants.*” This report documents the increasing prevalence of the un-Christian treatment of immigrants. It focuses on three areas of humanitarian concern for the faith community: including the increases in hate speech and hate groups linked to the anti-immigrant movement, the upswing of harshly anti-immigrant local and state ordinances, and the impact of raids on immigrant families living in our country’s shadows.

The diverse group of Christian faith leaders called on Christians to reject hate speech aimed at immigrants and to remember that the scriptural call to “welcome the stranger among us” includes our neighbors and our fellow church members. As Thanksgiving approaches, participants urged Americans to recall both the blessings in their lives and the needs of “the least of these” in our nation, many of whom are undocumented immigrants working for a better life.

The denominations and organizations represented by today’s speakers advocate on behalf of 92 million Christians in the United States.

**“Considering the tenor of the current immigration debate, we must ask ourselves some hard questions: How long will we continue to allow anger and fear to shape this debate? When will we as people of faith stand up to reject this fear-mongering and demand a new start to this conversation, one that begins in a place of compassion and recognition of the dignity of all of**

**God's people. This is what scripture is calling us to do,"** said Rev. Jim Wallis, Founder and CEO of Sojourners.

**"The negative atmosphere currently surrounding immigrants and immigrant communities in our nation only leads to their further marginalization and lessens us as a nation. It is particularly unhelpful in finding a humane solution to our broken immigration system,"** said Bishop Wester Bishop of Salt Lake City, Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration.

**"It is time for reasonable Americans and for the faith community to rise up and clearly state that while we all desire to protect our borders and apply the rule of law, we will not embrace the nativist and discriminatory rhetoric articulated under the guise of border protection. We can stop illegal immigration, protect our borders, protect our values and simultaneously protect the American dream only if we work within the framework of Judeo Christian heritage. This Thanksgiving season, let us give thanks to God for quickening the spirit of righteousness and justice from sea to shining sea,"** said Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

**"The demonization of immigrants in the media and by some members of Congress, coupled with the sudden increase of deportations and lack of federal regulation of detention standards represents an assault on the human rights of all immigrants, regardless of their legal status. Therefore, we call on people of faith to stand with immigrants as fellow human beings deserving of God's love and to advocate for effective immigration policies consistent with our history as a nation that respects the rule of law, but welcomes immigrants who come in search of a better life,"** said James Winkler, General Secretary of the United Methodist Church, General Board of Church & Society.

*Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform* undertook an examination of how the debate on immigration has impacted our communities. What we found is that our values are being undermined and our communities divided in this increasingly bitter debate. Like it or not, a battle for the soul of America has begun over the place of undocumented immigrants in our society, and people of goodwill cannot wish it away just because it is ugly or controversial. This report focuses on three areas of humanitarian and moral concern for the faith community:

- **We demonstrate that the tone of the national debate over immigration is being set by organizations deeply rooted in hate.** Too many people, from the media to community leaders, have stood aside as pro-eugenics and other hateful sources have updated the tactics of Jim Crow for the more sophisticated media environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The result is a movement able to flood Congress with phone calls and a notable growth in hate groups nationally that is attributable to anti-immigrant sentiment. It is noteworthy that outrageous statements have become the norm – consider Arizona talk radio host Brian James, who had this idea for dealing with border crossings into his state: “What we'll do is randomly pick one night every week where we will kill whoever crosses the border...step over there and you die. You get to decide whether it's your lucky night or not. I think that would be more fun.”
- **We show that this hateful debate is not only playing out in Washington D.C., but that at a state and local level, communities are being ripped apart.** Bloggers discuss ridiculous accusations linking immigrants to scourges from leprosy to pedophilia, and counties pass stringently anti-immigrant ordinances. The loudest voices are winning, and they are not voices of understanding or mercy, but of anger and division.

- **As a result of this debate, we are witnessing the endangerment of Christian and American values of compassion and respect for the human dignity of every person, as immigrant families are ripped apart and individual undocumented immigrants are treated as less than human.** In the Latino community, even 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation American citizens are being made to question their acceptance in society. Raids are threatening family unity both through physical separation and economic insecurity, victimizing many children who are American citizens and expressing an unwillingness to welcome even those who came to this country as young children.

The religious community is uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge across our differences on immigration and a source of healing and reconciliation. We as Christians are pledging to do more to unite our communities and restore the fabric of our society that this growing hate threatens to tear apart. Through *Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform*, Christian leaders are speaking out through the media, educating their congregations about biblical responses to immigration, and mobilizing the voices of people of faith.

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