

**Presbytery of Southern New England
Immigration Task Force
Annual Report to Presbytery
May 2008**

The Immigration Task Force came into being after the Presbytery of Southern New England, at its September 2006 meeting, passed a motion presented by the Social Justice Committee “to develop a comprehensive approach to immigrant concerns as called for by items 3, 4, 5 and 13 of the 217th General Assembly (2006) Overture on Advocacy and Welcome for All Immigrants.” The referenced items include developing and implementing strategies, policies, and protocols to educate congregations and presbytery members with regard to ministries with immigrant peoples, empowering those ministries at a local and presbytery-wide level, and standing with those who are oppressed.

The Task Force began meeting in June 2007, with 18 members appointed by Presbytery Moderator, the Rev. Marilyn McNaughton. The task force membership is diverse and includes recent immigrants. By the end of March of 2008 it had met six times. A summary of what the task force has done includes:

- Getting acquainted and sharing information among task force members through relevant and thoughtful emails
- Researching what others are doing and reporting this to the task force
- Making regular announcements and handouts on immigrant issues for presbytery meetings
- Conducted a task force meeting with guests from interested churches and held a Service of Solidarity at Christ is Life Presbyterian Church in Fall River, MA in December 2007
- Conducted a Bible Study at the February 4, 2008 meeting of Presbytery at Christ Is Life in Fall River
- Initiated an application for a mission grant from the Synod of the Northeast New England Presbytery Partnership Group (PPG) to support the hiring of an Immigration Consultant to the three presbyteries in the New England PPG (Southern New England, Northern New England, and Boston)

From the beginning the task force experienced tension between developing a comprehensive approach for the presbytery and actively engaging in advocacy for immigrant concerns. The task force sees an urgent and pressing need for advocacy, and finds it difficult to “develop a comprehensive approach.” But as a winding journey through the first year nears the end, task force members are beginning to see a way forward. Activities undertaken have convinced the task force that

1. It is good to be together as members of a task force dedicated to immigrant issues and there is a desire to continue the journey together;
2. For the foreseeable future there is a major educational task to be done
 - a. Bible studies on just treatment of immigrants;
 - b. Educating task force members, presbytery members, and church members on the facts and fiction of immigrant issues in the United States;
 - c. Offering help and resources to churches in this presbytery in planning educational events or hands-on mission projects around immigrant issues;
3. The task force wants to stand up for just laws and just treatment for all who live in this country although a climate of suspicion and discrimination against immigrants is

- pervasive in the society. Because those who hear advocacy for justice often turn away, task force members know there is a need to find new and loving ways to approach them.
4. The task force wants to be in solidarity with the immigrant churches and fellowships in the presbytery and with churches that have recent immigrant members. The task force wants to know them better and find ways to help others in the presbytery get to know them.
 5. The task force likes the idea of working with Boston and Northern New England presbyteries on immigrant issues and wants to continue to seek a synod mission grant to enable the three presbyteries to hire a person to coordinate and facilitate the work of New England PC(USA) churches in this area.

When the task force began meeting, Rev. Dana Lindsley suggested that it ought to report to presbytery and make a recommendation as to how presbytery can proceed to carry out the mandate of the 217th GA(06) Overture on Advocacy and Welcome for All Immigrants. Furthermore, the task force agreed to make this report at or before the September 08 presbytery meeting.

With all of the above in mind, before September, the Task Force will consider and revise or accept the following statements as a comprehensive approach to immigration issues in the Presbytery of Southern New England:

1. The Immigration Task Force shall continue for a three year period, reporting to a committee of presbytery as designated by the Presbytery Council. At the end of the three years, the task force shall again consider and recommend what is needed.
2. The purpose of the Immigration Task Force shall be to
 - a. educate task force members and the presbytery on immigration issues
 - b. offer assistance and resources to the churches of the presbytery as they plan worship, education events or mission projects on immigration issues
 - c. plan events within the presbytery to enable the members to know the presbytery's immigrant churches and fellowships better
 - d. work together on common tasks with the presbyteries of Boston and Northern New England
 - e. advocate for just immigration laws and just treatment of immigrants