

America's Immigration Dilemma

... A Pastoral Message Presented by Pastor Steve Riggle on Sunday, July 20, 2025 to Grace Woodlands and Grace Encourager.

You can watch the message to the church here:



English Version:
grace.tv/ImmigrationSermon



Spanish Version:
grace.tv/SermonMigracion

These notes and the accompanying Paper on Immigration and Pastor Council Declaration of February 2025 are being distributed to provide a Biblical perspective on immigration and as a call to action to our President and Congress to address the current crisis in a common sense Biblical way balancing justice and mercy. Please distribute these notes and documents to all of your contacts.

America's Immigration Dilemma: Message Notes

Intro.....

In the biblical period, there was never a moment in which the land of Israel was exclusively occupied by the people of Israel.

From the time of the conquest (*ca. 1200 BCE*) until the Roman period, various people groups—Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, Moabites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, all lived among the Israelites.

As a result, most Israelites would have had real, everyday encounters with the gēr.

While the OT's overall commentary on the gēr is complex and at times conflicted, its various legal materials offer a relatively consistent set of commandments and statutes aimed at protecting the stranger and providing for their wellbeing.

The legal materials in question can be found in each of the major law collections in the OT: the Covenant Code (*Exodus 20:22-23:19*), the Deuteronomic Code (*Deuteronomy 12-26*), and the Holiness Code (*Leviticus 17-26*), as well as a smattering of other laws in the Pentateuch.

What do we learn? An argument for a balance of justice and compassion and mercy.

Jeremiah..... Jeremiah sets these before the king in great power. The first area is summarized for us in Chapter 23, Verses 1-2:

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings," says the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:1-2 RSV)

Who are these shepherds? They are the kings of the nation. Rulers and government leaders are the shepherds of God. You find all through the Old and the New Testaments that this idea is behind God's concept of government. Governmental leaders are to be shepherds of the people, watching over them and taking care of them.

Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. (Jeremiah 22:3 RSV)

Behind the government is the preacher, the church. That is why Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world." Paul says of the church, "You are the pillar and ground of the truth." Ultimately, truth rests right there with what is going on among the people of God, and among the preachers of the people of God.

Jeremiah points out some of the things which were wrong among the preachers—these prophets. First, Verse 16: *Thus says the Lord af hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes..." (Jeremiah 23:16a RSV)*

"That is the first thing which has gone wrong -- they are filling you with vain hopes, telling you things are going to be all right when they are not all right. They preach messages which make it sound as if man is going to work out his difficulties and everything is going to be fine -- we can count on it. 'Ultimately these problems are going to be solved,' they say. But they are vain hopes." Why? Well, secondly, he reveals, *"...they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:16b RSV)*

That is why they are vain hopes. They are just their own ideas of what is happening in the nation, their own subjective viewpoints of what is wrong in life, their own opinions and religious ideas. And that is all they are worth. They have not sat and listened to the voice of God.

Verse 18 says, *"For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to perceive and to hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened?" (Jeremiah 23:18 RSV)*

That is what was wrong with the prophets. That is what has happened in America.

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR FOCUS...

"He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8 NKJV)

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." (Matthew 23:23 NKJV)

*****examples of situations... What do you do with these people?

You start with the person....a name and a face....they matter to God....He is watching.

It is time to act.....with courage.....and compassion....

Our problem is a pendulum problem....

How do we approach this current crisis that is before us in a common sense way that balances both justice and mercy?

1... I am writing first as a Biblical Christian doing my best to live by the precepts and values of the Kingdom of God,
2... as a conservative, engaged, voting American citizen,
3... as a pastor of thousands of church members for 56 years,
4... as the President of Grace International, a church organization with more than 5,400 churches and more than 500,000 members in 130 nations of the world,
5... as the President of the US Pastor Council, Texas Pastor Council and Houston Area Pastor Council which authored a immigration pastor declaration in 2010 calling on legislators to address this burgeoning dilemma. That declaration was updated in February 2025 and issued again with a framework to address the current immigration crisis.

That update is attached.

This open letter will be distributed to the 20k plus who are a part of our mailing list urging pastors all over the nation to address this as I am doing today.

2010....Pastor Council declaration

2025....revised Pastor Council declaration

In 15 years.....as pastors, we have not changed what we believe would resolve this once and for all.

But, our elected officials would not listen. They didn't address this problem holistically.

So now, we have a bigger mess.....by far...a crisis....a humanitarian dilemma.

Under the previous administration illegal immigration exploded.....we became a borderless nation.....the images of caravans of people pouring into our nation filling the news, some of whom with nefarious intentions to harm our nation, some with criminal histories who have made our cities less safe.....

and several hundred thousand children missing.....

THIS IS BEYOND UNBELIEVABLE.....

No one listened....I am not sure anyone even responded.

A new Gallup poll indicates that the positions articulated here are supported by most Americans.

I am very conservative... I have stood for... Life, marriage, against trafficking of children and women, limited government, fiscal sanity, living within our means, against the transitioning and sexual mutilation of our children.

I have even had my sermons subpoenaed including 17 other categories by our former mayor and threatened with incarceration for simply not wanting biological males to be allowed into women's locker rooms, change rooms and restrooms.

I believe in secure borders. I believe in the rule of law. I believe in national sovereignty and order. I have always supported policies that strengthen our nation and protect our communities.

But I also believe in people—people made in the image of God. People whose stories are complex. People who are living, breathing examples of the mercy we've all received. And I believe there is a way to uphold both justice and compassion, law and mercy, truth and grace.

It is neither realistic nor moral to round up millions of men, women, and children—many of whom were brought here as toddlers—and force them out of the only country they’ve ever known.

These are not criminals hiding in the shadows. These are neighbors and workers. Many are parents of U.S. citizens. They are caregivers, small business owners, construction workers, and worshipers in our churches. They are known by name and loved by people across this country.

It is easy to talk about “illegals” in theory. It’s different when the man you’re talking about is the one who helps build your house, or the woman who faithfully cleans your office, or the child who sits next to your child in class. When the story has a name and a face, it now becomes personal.

Mr. President, you did campaign on the promise to fix this problem once and for all. In a short period of time you have effectively closed our borders which stops this crisis from expanding further. For that, I commend you. Thank you for taking this important first step.

Now, please provide the directive to the immigration officials to eliminate the several year backlog that many people are facing who have already completed everything they can and who qualify for acceptance, but simply need a signature to finish their process.

You have shown your compassion toward the plight of many. Just as you have necessarily and courageously taken strong positions to make America great again, you have also shown your heart for people in need, people who couldn’t help themselves. Watching you lead with strong conviction and then compassionately turn aside to care for individual people has made people like me proud of you and of our nation once again!

You were resolute in protecting the life of the unborn. With the same heart of compassion I am asking you to humanely address those who are productive members of our society, but who are here illegally, many of whom came as infants or young children. Most of these came simply seeking a better life. For sure, you did not create this crisis, but you can be the president who will fix it...and do so in such a way that exhibits strength of leadership and compassion toward these people who cannot help themselves. I urge you to craft a plan that allows those who have been in our country longer than five years to remain here based on the following conditions,

- They do not have a criminal record of crimes against a person or their possessions.
- They have no ties to terrorism.
- They are gainfully employed or have their own business and are productive participants in their community.
- They pay a reasonable fine for being here illegally.

Many, many of these have children or spouses who are already legal in some capacity. They are mothers and fathers and sons and daughters who have been a part of the fabric of our nation for years.

Many of these have completed post secondary education and are now doctors, lawyers, professionally employed and business owners. In your words, they are the best and brightest.

Mr. President, I urge you to take a wise and measured stand on this. Do not embrace a path of mass deportation. It will divide the nation and cost the support of many who have stood with you. We are looking to you for clarity, for mercy, and for common sense. If the path of deporting this group of people is taken, you lose me....that is a step too far.

I voted for you, but not for that. May God help you to do the right thing, what I believe you know in your heart to do, and not give in to those who are pressuring you to take a very hard stance, one I believe you and us as a nation will one day regret.

To the Republicans, you risk losing your majority if you think you can tear apart families who are productive members of our society through mass deportation, whose only “crime” is that they came here many years ago, many of them as infants or small children, deport them to countries they know little or nothing about, and voters like me will still return you to office.

WE WILL NOT!

Throughout the last election cycle many of you advocated for a return to common sense governance. This is your opportunity to fulfill what you advocated for. If in fact, you will deal with this group of people humanely and compassionately and provide a way for them to remain here in the life they have already created for themselves, you will win over a voting bloc that already embraces the values of the Republican Party. Adding the majority of the legal Hispanic voters to the Republican base will ensure victories up and down the ballot for years to come.

To my fellow pastors: many of you stood courageously for the unborn when others remained silent. You prayed, you preached, and you persevered. And after nearly 50 years of faithful advocacy, we saw Roe overturned. It was a historic victory rooted in conviction and compassion.

But now, I urge you—don’t stop short of applying that same moral clarity to this issue. Let your pastoral prophetic voice be raised. If we stood for the unborn, let us also stand for the stranger. If we cried out for the voiceless in the womb, let us not forget those living quietly among us, longing for the opportunity to live with dignity and peace. They are our neighbors, working in our fields, building our homes, cleaning our buildings, and sitting in our congregations. They are people, created in the image of God. And our response must reflect the heart of Christ.

This is not a departure from our values. It is the fulfillment of them. It is dealing with a present reality in a compassionate way rather than capitulating to a knee jerk reaction of political expediency. May your voice and mine not be silenced by intimidation or threat whether without or within.

To my fellow American believers in Christ. You are first Christians, citizens of the Kingdom of God, called to live out the virtue and values of His invisible Kingdom here on the earth. That is what makes you a good American citizen and also what will actually make America great again. When the values of God’s Kingdom prevail, all of the nation benefits by living under the hand of God Almighty from which comes blessing, and the respect and value for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness flourishes. Living first in His Kingdom calls you higher than the posturing of the political world. As we face this particular defining moment in our nation, may we as the Church, commissioned by Jesus Himself, stand strong for justice and mercy, and walk humbly before our God.

This is not first a political issue. It is first a moral issue....and God is watching.
For the sake of our great Republic, we must get this right!

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America's Immigration Dilemma: *A Biblical Paper on Immigration*

Introduction

Immigration is one of the most pressing issues facing America today, and like every other challenge, the Church's response must be firmly rooted in Scripture. This biblical paper is intended to provide food for thought for the Christian believer who is being bombarded from all sides regarding the subject of immigration. How do we as believers balance the immigration crisis we currently face in such a way that the problem is justly addressed, a comprehensive resolution is enacted, and people made in the image of God are treated with mercy and compassion? This paper will briefly address borders, legal immigration, and a biblical understanding of the gēr, which is the foreigner among us.

Borders

Boundaries are a natural part of life—both physical and emotional. We lock our doors, close our gates, and build fences to protect what matters most. We carry keys and set passwords, not only to keep certain things out but also to safeguard what is precious within. In the same way, healthy emotional boundaries guard our hearts and minds, helping us determine who and what we allow to influence our lives. Without doors, gates, and locks, our homes would be vulnerable; without emotional boundaries, so would our souls. This is why it is so important to establish both physical and digital safeguards for children. Parents establish these safeguards by setting passwords and limiting access, creating protective borders that shield the whole child—mind, heart, and soul.

Borders are boundaries in the context of nations and are essential to the security and stability of any country, much like the principle that one cannot enter another person's home without permission. Natural borders deter people from stealing and coveting, restraining the impulse to violate the divine commandments. Entering a nation without its consent should never be regarded lightly.

The Bible affirms this truth about boundaries. In the Old Testament, Moses is given clear boundaries to define the land of God's people (Num. 34:1–12), establishing the physical borders of the promised inheritance. Later, Nehemiah is called to rebuild the city walls—not only to provide security and stability but to reclaim their identity as God's covenant community. Borders are not just lines on a map; they represent who we are and where we belong.

Borders not only protect a nation but also powerfully provide a historically cherished and unique identity as a sovereign people. They mark the boundaries of belonging and shape the story of who we are as a community under God's providence. Scripture reminds us, "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Prov. 25:28), underscoring the importance of boundaries both personally and collectively. Without self-control, chaos and anarchy take hold—a reality this nation has recently experienced—showing that the absence of boundaries leads to disorder and vulnerability. This leads to the next section—the responsibility of government to establish and uphold immigration laws that secure the good and integrity of the nation.

Legal Immigration

Governments are called to seek the good of a nation, as affirmed in Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–14. This means that immigration policies should primarily support the well-being of that specific nation. The intent of a government to seek the good of its people is reflected in the opening words of the U.S. Constitution, which declares its purpose is to "ensure domestic tranquility," "provide for the common defense," and "promote the general welfare." Immigration policies, therefore, should be crafted to protect the nation's overall stability and health.

In addition, these policies should clearly communicate that immigrants are expected to live by the laws of the land, just as citizens are required to do—laws which, for immigrants, specifically include immigration statutes. This expectation is rooted in the biblical command of Romans 13:1: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.” Immigration policy should provide an appropriate and reasonable opportunity for people to live in the land, while also addressing those who choose to persist in disobedience to both biblical instruction and U.S. law. When any law is broken, consequences are necessary, though the punishment should always fit the crime.

This is where the current predicament arises. For some, the consequence for those in the country illegally should be deportation. For others, a more merciful approach is suggested—one that imposes consequences but still allows the possibility of legal residency. This tension reflects the ongoing struggle to balance justice and mercy in national policy.

The “Gēr”

In the biblical context, outsiders are individuals who reside in or visit a land to which they are not indigenous. The original languages of the Bible—Hebrew and Greek—employ distinctly different terms for such individuals, categorizing them with intentionality and precision. While many modern translations attempt to honor these distinctions, the selected terms are often exercised interchangeably and inconsistently. This leads to a conflation of categories and dilutes the original meaning within the text. In short, without a thorough study of the original language, the intended meaning of the various biblical terms for the outsider can be lost in translation.

Four words reflect distinct classifications of an outsider in the Hebrew context: **gēr**, **tôshāb**, **nokrî/ben nēkār**, and **zār**. These terms are scattered throughout the Old Testament and, though there is some synonymy among them, the overall consistent usage of each distinct Hebraic term fosters a comprehensive consensus of meaning for each.

This brief exegetical essay will primarily focus on the word **gēr** for two main reasons: first, the term **gēr** is by far the most prevalent designation given for the outsider; and second, **gēr** best expresses the outsider’s willingness to abide by the law of the land, as well as his desire for the protection and blessing of living under the providence of God.

Gēr as Sojourner or Alien

The term **gēr** appears 92 times in the Old Testament (*Strong’s H1616*) and is always defined as a sojourner or alien seeking shelter in a foreign land. A **gēr** is an individual, group, or tribe who has typically abandoned their home as a refugee due to political unrest, famine, economic hardship, or other difficult circumstances. Though the **gēr** was not adopted into Israelite family systems, these sojourners were accepted by indigenous families as guests or hired servants (*Lev. 25:6; Deut. 24:14; Mal. 3:5*). A few early examples of **gēr** as sojourners and refugees in the biblical text are:

- Abraham in Hebron – *Gen. 23:4*
- Moses in Midian – *Ex. 2:22; 18:3*
- Elimelech’s family in Moab – *Ruth 1:1*
- The Ephraimite in Gibeah – *Judges 19:16*
- The Israelites in Egypt – *Ex. 22:20; Deut. 10:19*

In the biblical world, the *gēr* is unlike the other designated foreigners and is significantly distinguished from the general outsider (*nokrî* or *zār*) in a meaningful way. It is important to note that the *gēr* is never portrayed pejoratively in the Bible. Unlike the *gēr*, the other three classifications of the foreigner (*nokrî*, *ben nēkār*, *zār*, and sometimes *tôshāb*) often carry negative or suspicious connotations—especially in covenantal, religious, or legal contexts. These outsiders are primarily perceived as spiritually dangerous and culturally incompatible, particularly because of their association with idolatry, prostitution, and the profane.

In contrast, the *gēr* has settled peacefully in the land—temporarily or long-term—and has been granted special status within Israelite society and special provision in accordance with the law. He holds a unique and often vulnerable place in society, which is why God consistently groups him within the same protected category as widows and orphans.

The *gēr* did not own the land he settled and was typically under the care and authority of an Israelite who offered provision and protection (*Deut. 24:14*). Though the *gēr* was economically poor, he was not without standing in the eyes of God. God's law clearly extended care and concern for him in various ways, such as:

- Gleaning rights – *Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19–21*
- Participation in the tithe – *Deut. 14:29; 26:11–13*
- Inclusion in Sabbath year provision – *Lev. 25:6*
- Protection under the law and access to cities of refuge – *Num. 35:15*

Participation in Israel's religious life was also open to the *gēr*—on the condition of covenantal obedience. If circumcised, he could join in feasts (*Ex. 12:48; Deut. 16:11, 14*), bring offerings, and was expected to uphold the purity laws (*Lev. 17:8–16*). Since the *gēr* was afforded the blessings of the law, he was also expected to live in obedience to the law and was held accountable for serious offenses such as idolatry (*Lev. 20:2*) and blasphemy (*Lev. 24:16, 22*). His acceptance as an outsider within the indigenous community came with both privileges and responsibilities. One of the most remarkable insights surrounding the *gēr* is how the heart of God beats for him. The Lord Himself accepts and watches over him:

- He is under divine protection – *Deut. 10:18; Ps. 146:9; Mal. 3:5*
- He is not to be oppressed or mistreated – *Ex. 22:20; 23:9*
- Israelites are commanded to love the *gēr* as themselves – *Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19*

Observations

- **The people of God were referred to as *gēr*.**

Theologically speaking, Israel's call to love the *gēr* mirrored their story. Their life in the land was always marked by the posture of a sojourner. Even as they inherited the Promised Land, they were reminded that the land ultimately belonged to the Lord. As Leviticus 25:23 makes clear, the right to possess land had to be stewarded carefully because the Israelites themselves were *gerim*—resident aliens—living before YHWH.

This wasn't simply legal language; it shaped their identity. The psalmist echoes this in Psalm 39:12, crying out to God as a sojourner, just like his ancestors—dependent, vulnerable, and in desperate need of mercy. David continues this theme in his prayer dedicating provisions for the temple (*1 Chron. 29:15*), acknowledging that Israel's presence in the land was temporary and dependent on God's grace. Similarly, Psalm 119:19 echoes this awareness: "*I am a stranger on the earth; do not hide your commands from me.*"

This self-perception of the people of God as *gēr* is continued in the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:11 calls followers of Christ “foreigners and exiles.” Paul explains to the Philippian church that “*our citizenship is in heaven*” (Phil. 3:20). The entire biblical narrative reminds us—we are not owners, but stewards; not settlers, but sojourners.

- **God instructed the people of God to approach the *gēr* with compassion.**

The Israelites were repeatedly told that their approach toward the *gēr* was to be informed by their knowledge of history and theology.

- Exodus 22:21 – “*Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.*”
- Exodus 23:9 – “*Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.*”

This sentiment and argument are repeated throughout the Old Testament (Lev. 19:33–34; Deut. 10:19). As shown above, the *gēr* had both privileges and responsibilities.

- **Certain foreigners and sojourners were looked upon with suspicion.**

The people of God looked upon the *nokrî* with suspicion because they were the spiritual opposites of Israel. They refused to be circumcised or assimilate (Ex. 12:48–49). Intermarriage with the *nokrî* was discouraged because it led to idolatry and other detestable practices (Ezra 9:1–3).

Similarly, the *zār*—translated “stranger,” “outsider,” “alien,” or “foreigner”—was often viewed with suspicion. They were portrayed as creditors seizing possessions (Ps. 109:11; Prov. 11:15) or outsiders consuming the land’s produce (Prov. 5:10). In Psalm 54:3, David expresses particular concern about the vengeful stranger—the Ziphites. The words *nokrî* and *zār* and their variants are even used to describe foreign or “strange” gods.

Applications

While addressing the problem of illegal immigration, Christians in the United States must first be biblical before we are political. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God before we are American citizens. Scripture reminds us that we are strangers and aliens, pilgrims and sojourners on this earth, with our ultimate citizenship in heaven. This mindset must guide all action toward those made in the image of God.

The Bible instructs us to treat sojourners and resident aliens with kindness and compassion. Moses’ Law repeatedly pointed Israel to this principle, and the New Testament affirms it in the command to love our neighbor and to show hospitality to strangers.

While the Bible does not provide a specific timeframe for the assimilation of the *gēr* into Israel’s community, it is safe to assume that over time they became part of the people of God through religious and cultural assimilation. In the same way, people who have lived in the U.S. for an extended period, obeyed its laws, and posed no threat should be afforded legal recognition. Below are a few practical applications of these biblical principles:

- The border should be sealed to contain the current crisis and prevent it from worsening.
- Babies born in the U.S. are historically American citizens. If illegal immigration were fully addressed now, the issue would effectively be resolved in one generation.

- The current legal immigration system should be reformed into a fair and efficient “front door” reflecting American compassion and opportunity, as the current system is broken and encumbered by excessive red tape.
- Those who refuse to assimilate to American values, as expressed in the Constitution, and who seek to do harm, should be treated with suspicion and removed.

Conclusion

America isn't a theocracy, but we do have a system of justice with laws. As God's people (*who are also citizens of this nation*), we are called to support and uphold the law of the land so long as it is in alignment with natural law and, more importantly, God's Word. Non-citizens, whether they are visiting or residing, should be expected to abide by the established laws of the land, as it is the right thing to do. Additionally, they should anticipate appropriate consequences for any and all violations.

As a nation of immigrants, founded upon Judeo-Christian principles, we must also love mercy. We should continue to mirror the invitational nature of Israel in the Old Testament and establish a process to welcome the *gēr* who similarly wants to belong and willingly agrees to adhere to the laws of the land. A plan should be legislated, reflecting a Scriptural balance between justice and mercy and, at the same time, allowing freedom to ring loudly for those who embody these poetic words:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

More importantly, as people of the Word, we must be guided by these four biblical principles:

- God Created Us in His Image – *Imago Dei*, *Gen. 1:27*
- God Commands Us to Love – *Matt. 22:36–40*
- God Requires Us to Balance Justice and Mercy with Humility – *Mic. 6:8; Matt. 5:7*
- God Commissions Us to Make Disciples of All Nations – *ta ethna*, *Matt. 28:18–20*

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America's Immigration Dilemma: *US Pastor Council Declaration on Border Security and Immigration Reform*

Pastors' Declaration on Border Security and Immigration Reform

(Created and signed in 2010, updated January 2025; posted at www.uspastorcouncil.org)

Preamble

A PASTORAL APPEAL FOR A REASONED APPROACH TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

Understanding that we have a crisis in our nation because of the mushrooming number of people crossing our borders illegally, we commend President Trump for being willing to address this crisis with actions that we trust will resolve this in a way that balances justice, mercy, and common sense. Without question the issue of illegal immigration must be addressed. Because of the inaction of Congress and previous Presidents, this issue, fixed easily a number of years ago, is now a major crisis and contains a significant security threat to the nation. It also has complexities in that many of those here illegally have been here for many years. They are part of the fabric of the United States and pose no security threat.

They are now a productive part of the economy. Their children have grown up here and in many cases have no knowledge of any other nation. The question is how is that to be achieved in a way that seals our borders and deports those who have criminal records, relation to gangs or gang activity, any suspected potential terror links, also those who entered the country illegally after January 1, 2020 and at the same time in a common sense way shows mercy toward those who do not fit that criteria?

With the approach contained in this pastoral appeal, this issue would be resolved within one generation in a comprehensive way. Our intent is to speak with a reasoned and, we believe, biblically grounded voice to much fear and confusion surrounding the Trump administration's delivery on his promise to rapidly begin enforcing immigration laws with an emphasis on removing violent criminals. Fifteen years ago this team of pastors rose to the occasion on this very issue due to escalation of fear, anger and rhetoric around illegal immigration by crafting and presenting a declaration calling on our elected officials to abide by its historic principles.

The Pastors' Declaration on Border Security and Immigration Reform was created in 2010 and recently updated, to offer what we believe to be a solid balance between justice (the rule of law) and compassion (treating all people with dignity and respect). We recognize that even like-minded people of the Christian faith can disagree on strategy even where we agree on principle, and our objective was to avoid attempting to "write legislation" but rather to assert clear principles.

Hundreds of Pastors throughout Texas and in over twenty states, representing essentially every ethnic and denominational background, signed on in the 2010 launch of this declaration. As we resubmit this in February of 2025 we pray and expect that those serving us in state legislative bodies, the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate and the White House will hear, listen to and respond to the voices of pastors representing hundreds of thousands of god-fearing, patriotic citizens of faith from coast to coast who firmly call for action according to these principles - now.

We call on every member of the Texas State Legislature and the United States Congress to publicly support and provide proactive leadership to see this present crisis resolved in a humane way that includes, but is not limited to, the following steps that can and should be performed simultaneously:

Step One – Secure our National Borders First

- It is the first business of our government to protect the safety and welfare of citizens against “enemies foreign and domestic.” The well-established fact that drug cartels, gang members, other violent criminal elements and now Middle Eastern operatives linked to Islamic terrorism are freely moving across our southern border has created an urgent national security crisis.

Action Needed:

- Effectively and justly empower and support the location, incarceration and/or removal of those here illegally with criminal records or have committed violent crimes while here, for the basic public safety of American citizens and civil order.
- All borders, with specific priority to the southern border of the United States, must be secured as soon as possible using whatever means necessary to stop all entry from points other than regulated crossing stations.
- Border walls, adequately armed U.S. military presence, electronic surveillance, expanded and fully supported Border Patrol forces, full enforcement of all existing immigration laws and policy changes protecting citizens as well as law enforcement from persecution, prosecution or lawsuits when acting to protect life and property are examples of first steps that need to be implemented.

Step Two – Reform the Immigration System

- The process of entering the country legally is fraught with red tape, fraud, delays, unacceptable costs, unrealistically low quotas and inhumane treatment for many if not most people who desire to emigrate to the U.S. temporarily for education or work, or permanently as citizens. This system needs to be reformed so people legitimately seeking temporary or permanent residency in this country are treated with dignity and respect.

Action Needed:

- Government agencies charged with assessing and processing immigration requests are severely understaffed and inadequately funded to handle the backlog of immigration applications. Current staffing at American embassies charged with assessing and processing immigration applications should be better trained, better screened and/or replaced as necessary with uniform standards provided for greater accountability.
- Congress needs to reform immigration laws to address significant backlogs under quotas for highly skilled immigrants; to establish meaningful quotas for semi and low-skilled workers as well as enact a temporary worker program so that where there are proven shortages of U. S. workers, there is a mechanism by which workers can enter legally while maintaining their family ties to their home countries.

Congress also needs to modernize the verification process by which employers determine who is authorized to work in the U.S.

Step Three – Implement a just process to legal status for specified illegal immigrants

- While illegal immigrants have violated immigration laws to enter the country or overstayed their lawfully permitted time, there needs to be a process of providing those who qualify, are involved in lawful commerce and wish to remain here a means of doing so either as guest workers or eventually as citizens, with the proviso that they be required to display proficiency in the English language and critical facts about our American history, the basis of our constitutional republic and the duties of citizenship within a reasonable period of time to qualify for either status.

Action Needed:

- For those with no criminal record and who have proof they entered the country before January 1, 2020 illegally or remained illegally, execute a fixed period of open registration and, for those qualified, provide a temporary work visa which contains requirement of adequate civil penalties yet does not universally require them to return to their country of origin and which provides protection of legal status. Once that registration period has passed, any violation of immigration laws should result in immediate deportation.
- Any person found to have committed crimes against property or person while here, or with a felony criminal record in his or her home country, should be denied legal status of any kind and immediately deported.
- Effectively enforce laws which prohibit non-citizens from receiving entitlement to non-emergency government services unless specifically adopted by legislative process at the state or federal level.

We the undersigned pastors declare our commitment to using our voice and influence in every way possible to support these principles. We will also publicly hold accountable those who choose to remain silent, who are divisive for purely political purposes, or who act in opposition to these principles.