

Talking Points on Family Unity in Immigration Reform, March 2013

Background: As we are advocating for immigration reform, we have become aware that the Senate bipartisan proposal is likely to eliminate certain family-based visa categories - siblings and adult children in particular. Now is the time to weigh in with senators and let them know we oppose making it harder for people to reunite with their families.

We want to be able to support an immigration reform bill that provides a pathway to citizenship for our undocumented community members but immigration reform must also strengthen - not weaken - the family immigration system. For more information, please see the [compiled faith statements on recent family immigration hearings](#) and a recent [Washington Post article](#) on this proposal.

Call 1-866-940-2439 or the Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121 to be connected to your senators' offices. Or, find your senators' direct phone numbers at www.senate.gov.

- We oppose the elimination or weakening of current family visa categories. Currently, U.S. citizens are permitted to sponsor their spouse, minor children, adult children, parents and siblings. Green card holders are only permitted to sponsor their spouse, minor children and adult unmarried children
- Share stories about your own family and/or families in your congregation or community, and what it would mean if the government prevented people from reuniting with their sibling or adult children
- At the center of our congregations and communities is the integrity of the familial structure. Many people of faith first learned about the brokenness of the immigration system by witnessing families in their congregations suffer through separation due to visa backlogs, detention, and deportation. We need an immigration system that prioritizes family unity and reunification.
- We support an increase in family-based visas so U.S. citizens and green card holders (lawful permanent residents or LPRs) don't have to wait years or decades to reunite. At minimum, there should be a temporary increase in family visas to clear the current backlog with integrity.
- We support provisions in the *Reuniting Families Act* that would reform the family-based visa system by:
 - Increasing the per-country cap from seven percent to fifteen percent to reduce backlogs
 - Recapturing unused visas for use in the following year
 - Reclassifying the spouses and minor children of green card holders (LPRs) as immediate relatives and reallocating visas saved to the other existing family categories
- While we agree that employment visas should also be increased, we oppose measures that would increase employment visas *at the expense of* family-based visas. It does not need to be a zero sum game. Congress should increase both family-based and employment-based visas.
- In 2007, many faith groups, including the United Methodist Church, the Catholic Church, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and many Jewish groups had to oppose the immigration reform bill. In large part, the opposition stemmed from the replacement of family visa categories with a point system in which education and employment were prioritized at the expense of family unity.
- Biblical representations of family show the sacredness of a unified family. There are many examples of close relationships between adult children and their parents: Abraham and Isaac, Mary and Jesus. There are also examples of siblings remaining close as adults: Mary and Martha, and disciples Simon Peter and Andrew, and James and John. See next page for more details.

Familial Bonds are Central to Religious Traditions as Represented in Scripture

Social and Historical Context: Families in the Hebrew Bible were close-knit with strong feelings of family loyalty. The administration of Biblical covenants included a principle of familial inclusion, which became a core value used as a metaphor for a relationship with God. Steadfast love was the basis of the familial covenant, which created a sense of loyalty, justice, and high regard for one another. In the Hebrew Bible, family has the purposes of reproduction, instruction, care giving, maintaining traditions, and conveying wisdom. For the Hebrew family, steadfast love was the heart of loyalty and solidarity. Covenants included all family relationships and have helped maintain the identity of the Hebrew family through today.

Hebrew Bible

Abraham and Isaac: The story of Abraham and Isaac shows the value that God places on family. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only son, the most important thing in his life. The surest test of Abraham's loyalty to the Lord is sacrificing his son. When Abraham shows his obedience, the Lord spares his son and blesses him with plentiful descendants. Family is the risk and family is the reward. (*Genesis 22: 1-19*)

Joseph and his Brothers: The story of Joseph, whose brothers violated the code of family covenant by selling him into slavery, shows the importance of forgiveness and family unity overcoming past wrongs. When Joseph rises to political power in Egypt, he is reunited with his brothers and accepts not only his own family into Egypt, but the entire tribe of Israel, so that they can escape the famine in the land of Canaan. (*Genesis 37-50*)

Ruth and Naomi: This well-known story highlights the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. When Ruth was widowed, she pledged her loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, who had Ruth migrate with her to Bethlehem to help her re-establish herself in a new land. With the assistance of Naomi, Ruth began to work in the fields and was able to eventually marry the landowner wherein she became the great-grandmother to David. The current U.S. immigration system would not recognize the familial relationship between this mother and her daughter-in-law. (*Ruth 1 and 2*)

Christian Texts

Mary and Jesus: The relationship between Mary and Jesus throughout his life and especially at the time of his death points to the interconnectedness of familial strength and the fluidity of family relationships. Mary's courage in the Immaculate Conception showed the dedication and strength of motherhood that continued throughout Jesus' ministry. Jesus clearly extended his understanding of the family model to include all of his disciples. These individuals are not independent of one another, but rather interconnected and interdependent. This points to how crucial it is to refrain from limiting the definition of family and the power that parents play in the lives of their adult children and vice-versa. (*John 19:25-27*)

Mary and Martha: The story of Mary and Martha displays the reliance that adult siblings can have on one another. Mary and Martha give one another mutual and diverse support. Martha welcomes Jesus into their home, which is an important action for Jesus and Mary's relationship. Martha points out that she needs Mary to help her do her work, exhibiting how adult siblings can depend on one another. Mary, however, is able to most fully understand and appreciate Jesus' presence; thereby teaching Martha an important lesson. The interdependence and wisdom that blossoms from these adult sisters' relationship is one so powerful that they are mentioned by name in multiple places in scripture. (*Luke 10:38-42*)

The Twelve Disciples: At least half of the twelve disciples were brothers and many more siblings were part of the larger following of Jesus. Jesus calls two pairs of brothers to follow him in his ministry. The first thing that Andrew does after he meets Jesus is share the news with his brother, Simon Peter, and together they become disciples of Jesus. The dependence and support between siblings is apparent in the story of James and John. They are fisherman together and followers of Jesus together. Jesus finds them fishing and asks that they follow him. This decision is a joint venture between the brothers. They are reliant on one another's support and trust themselves to follow Jesus together. Jesus does not collect one sibling and leave the other behind. He shows the value of sibling relationships by inviting both to follow him. As more disciples gather there is a sense that the family structure is extended to all followers, as sisters and brothers. (*Matthew 4:18-22 and 10:1-4; Mark 2:14 and 3:16-19; Luke 6:12-16; John 1:35-42*)