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*Special Issue on Immigration Reform*

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*May 2006*

*Restorer*



# Restorer



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## A word about this issue of the Restorer

For the last 15 years I have lived and ministered in the Mexican barrio of La Villita as a pastor, neighbor, advocate, and friend to many immigrant families that have made their way into this country in search of a better life for themselves and for their children.

Along the way, I have heard gut wrenching stories of families being separated through deportation, of financial hardship, of having to live in the shadows of society because of not being able to obtain legal status in the USA, and of men and women having to endure the indignity of being labeled as 'illegal aliens' instead of being referred to as human beings, created in the image of God.

I have done my best over the years to express love and concern towards my amazing friends. I have done this by helping them find medical help, locate affordable housing, learn English (while at the same time, they taught me Spanish), and by providing opportunities for their children (many who are American citizens by virtue of the fact that were born right here in Chicago) to excel in their studies.

While I am certain that all of these demonstrations of love and concern have been greatly appreciated, I have come to the realization that most of my individual efforts to help my undocumented neighbors fall way short of what they ultimately need; a change in the current immigration laws in our nation that will afford them an opportunity to live and work in this country without fear, and the same assurances that every other immigrant that has ever come to our nation of immigrants has sought—the opportunity to build a better life in this great nation.

Beyond all of this, I am convinced that God really loves immigrants from every nation. That His Kingdom is a place welcoming to all peoples...especially the least and the lost in any given society.

Finally, I am so proud of the leadership of CCDA for being proactive in encouraging all of us to engage fully in the dialogue regarding immigration reform. Only then can we influence our nation and the church to love our immigrant neighbors!

- Noel Castellanos  
 Institute Director

May 2006

## A Letter from John & Wayne Regarding Immigration Reform

**Dear CCDA Members;**

CCDA has always been about connecting reconciliation with justice. Whether it has related to issues of incarceration, housing or employment, or an inequitable education system in our cities, CCDA has sought to support and advocate for justice.

From the very beginning of our existence as an association, we have sought to make sure that Latinos, African American, Anglos, Asians, Native Americans and others would feel welcomed and embraced. And, while all of our communities deal with similar issues and concerns, there are times when unique issues affect one particular group in a dramatic way that the rest of us must rally around to support. Immigration has become such an issue.

It is obvious that the issue of immigration reform has ignited a great debate in our country; both in the halls of Congress and in the highways and byways of our nation. From Los Angeles, to Phoenix, from New York City to Dallas, from Atlanta to Chicago and almost everywhere in between, Americans are confused about how to deal with millions of undocumented immigrants. As compassionate Christians regularly involved in loving and serving 'the least of these' in our nation, we too are seeking God for wisdom, for how to relate to our undocumented neighbors, and how to engage in a way that brings about positive results that strengthen our nation, as well as increase our witness as followers of Christ, especially now that the immigration debate has become a mainstream concern and conversation.

As an association, CCDA, has made a commitment to become informed on the issues related to immigration, and to look to some of our most involved members and partners to help us to maneuver the steps we can take that can make a difference for the 12 million men, women, and children that are directly affected by our lawmaker's decisions in the coming days. At the heart of conviction is God's mandate that we love the stranger, or the foreigner.

In the Bible, God repeatedly calls us to show love and compassion towards aliens, or immigrants. In Deuteronomy 10:18-19 we are told that [God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. 'And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.' Leviticus 19:33-34 teaches us that when an alien lives with you in your land, not to mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. 'Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.'

Our prayer is that this issue of the Restorer will help to provide new insights, inspiration, and information that will help you and your ministries to better understand and engage in the current immigration crisis that our nation is facing.

May the Lord give all of us wisdom and courage to be salt and light at this crucial hour.

**Yours for a Better World,**

Dr. Wayne 'Coach' Gordon, Chairman, CCDA  
Dr. John Perkins, Chairman Emeritus, CCDA

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## A Biblical Basis for Immigration Reform

By Rev. Luis Cortes

As people of faith we are called to ground our conduct and treatment of others in our reading and understanding of scripture and what God, as revealed through scripture and through Jesus Christ, instructs and teaches us to be and to do. As such, our views on immigration are to be grounded and reared in Biblical Revelation. As we examine what the bible says about immigration, we quickly encounter that the seeds for the establishment of Israel and all Christianity begin with the following statement:

*The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." Genesis 12:1*

The people we come to know in the scripture as Israel, and we as a Christian people, begin our history by God ordaining immigration. It was God's call to migration and immigration that changed human history. God called one man to leave the known for the unknown, hence, to be immigrants – aliens in a strange land. Abraham's motivation was God's call to build a great nation of promise and blessing (*Genesis 12: 2-3*). It is a promise of something better – a better life, a better future and it motivates sojourns into the desert in search of a better tomorrow.

This is one of many immigration stories found in scripture. It creates an understanding, a call from God to never forget this history and requires of God's followers specific treatment of those called strangers, aliens, and immigrants. God instructs us, His people, "*to love those who are aliens for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt*" and to treat strangers by providing a place of rest, food and hospitality (*Genesis 18:4, 5; Deuteronomy 10:19*).

This model of hospitality and treatment informs the development of a biblical policy of care for the stranger. It is a policy grounded in the actual experiences of God's people who traveled to strange lands and who were often abused and exploited, as was the case of the people of Israel during the time of Moses. These experiences taught and required God's followers that care and treatment of the immigrant needs to inform our activities in this day. The Scripture clearly says,

*When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*

**Leviticus 19:33, 34**

*Do not mistreat the alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know what it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.*

**Exodus 23:9**

*Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow.*

**Deuteronomy 27:19**

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## Biblical Basis- CONTINUED

Throughout the Old Testament, lack of fidelity to a true worship of God as expressed in the ignoring of these precepts of fairness and justice were reasons for God's judgment against His people and their impending tragedy.

In the New Testament, this theme of the treatment of aliens and strangers or immigrants is continued. We find early in the narrative that our Savior was an immigrant forced to flee to Egypt. It is this history and experience of being an immigrant people that inform the words of Jesus throughout the gospels and which are clearly expressed in Matthew 25:37. The passage teaches to us about how we should treat others and it states, "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a **stranger** and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me*".

It is a call from Christ to all of us that are His followers to treat the alien, the stranger the immigrant with fairness, justice and hospitality. It is a call grounded in years of history and personal experience.

It is the same call to the care of others that God expects throughout the Biblical narratives from His people. It is a call grounded in what God seeks from His children and it is to be expressed in their works today (*Matthew 25:40*).

As a faith-based organization, Esperanza USA is called to live and act in the requirements articulated in scripture. These principles or calls to service are clear and definitive. They require demonstrations and actions that show concern for the immigrant by showing hospitality, providing shelter and care.

It is our Christian responsibility to care for those that live among us today. Given this understanding:

- Esperanza USA believes we must secure our borders and that Border Security remain a federal responsibility.
- Esperanza USA believes we should provide comprehensive reform that provides a legal and dignified way to be a part of our country.
- Esperanza USA believes we should not inflict inhumane and unreasonable demands on those here today simply to rectify our policy failures of the past.
- Esperanza USA believes it is unchristian to criminalize acts of mercy and compassion. We call on Senators to step up to the challenge in crafting a bill that would merit the support of the Evangelical faith community.
- Esperanza USA calls on our Evangelical brothers and sisters to denounce unchristian policy reform that ignores millions within our borders and millions more who would legally apply if there were means to do so. We ask for all Christians to stand for reform that reflects the values expressed in our history as followers of Christ.

*Rev. Cortes is the President of Esperanza USA, the largest Latino community development organization in the country. Rev. Cortes was a keynote speaker at our New Orleans CCDA conference in 2003.*

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## **How Immigration is Impacting One CCDA Ministry**

By Kit & Ian Danley

Neighborhood Ministries has been working in Phoenix's hard neighborhoods for almost 25 years. What began as a simple emergency food and clothing bank has now grown into a Christian Community Development organization which includes a multi-ethnic-bilingual church, outreach serving over 1000 kids and youth weekly, aggressive stay in school programs, a medical clinic, jobs placement, head start for preschool children, mentoring programs, a growing arts emphasis, an economic barter system, and a lot more. All of these programs have at their foundations an incarnational, relational heartbeat.

We also happen to live 4 hours from Nogales, a popular crossing point along the Arizona – Mexico border. As we have progressed in our journey of Christian Community Development we have continually been confronted with the obstacle of citizenship. Every housing strategy we dreamt up, every clever micro-enterprise scheme we crafted, even youth group trips to San Diego with some of our undocumented teens would eventually reveal our collective frustration in the current immigration system – a system of exclusion that makes us afraid even to drive down state highways for fear of border patrol agents and check points.

And then along came Proposition 200. Much like Proposition 187 in California, it prohibited undocumented immigrants from receiving any type of social services. It was intentionally vague as to which services it would affect; would people be accepted in emergency rooms? Would children be able to attend school? It scared many of us and forced us to enter into the debate.

We met an organizer with a local Industrial Areas Foundation project who invited us to a large inter-faith convocation where 3,000 people from Arizona churches, parishes, synagogues and mosques confronted local politicians around the issue of immigration. We asked for commitments from them to work for a more comprehensive solution. Over one-hundred of us attended and it felt good to finally be in the audience although disappointing to be the only evangelicals represented.

We signed up for being present one day per month at our state legislature where local politicians have proposed more than 50 anti-immigrant bills this session alone that if passed would deputize local police officers as border agents, eliminate in-state tuition for local undocumented students, build a wall along Arizona's southern border, make being in the country a trespassing felony, abolish publicly funded job training and adult education programs, prohibit the use of a Tax ID Number for the use of buying a home or securing other types of loans, and on and on the list goes. We regularly had over 20 people, legal and illegal, immigrants and citizens confront politicians together actively challenging the system towards a more just response to our immigration situation.

We read scripture like Leviticus 19:33-34 and Exodus 22:21-24 on the record in the face of politicians who publicly label immigrants as criminals, dangerous and unwanted. On one occasion we proudly paraded into a weekly political caucus with many moms and more strollers taking up all of the auxiliary seating saying nothing but listening intently to what our political leaders were saying about us. Our message was clear that day: we are here, we are listening and you will have to look us in the face as you purpose this hateful legislation.

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**- CONTINUED** Danley & Danley

Throughout all of this we learned about our own leadership potential. By sharing our stories we helped others to see the human face of the immigration debate. We did our homework and held workshops for others to hear the economic reality of immigrant contributions to our society and economy. Lately we have been meeting with other Hispanic evangelical leaders having conversations that never could have happened without the common ground of immigration reform. Doctrine and dogma are left at the door as we work on a cohesive strategy praying and learning together. We pray that these relationships will bring resources and connectedness to our city that has never before existed. TV stations interviewed us, and our pictures and one-liners made it into newspapers. The world was finally taking note of this immigrant leadership that has been preparing for this moment.

Some of our suburban partners saw this as a shift from our previous work of compassion towards more of an advocacy role. We struggled to see the distinction. After a church service dedicated completely to teaching about God's love for the stranger, we discovered some who were going to leave our church if we continued to "preach politics" from the pulpit. Again we could not see how this was any different from what we have been teaching during the last two decades. This didn't feel like playing politics to us. It was our relational response to living incarnationally in a community with our undocumented neighbors. We love undocumented people. We are going to struggle as they struggle.

And then we marched - as did many around the country. We were witness to the two largest protests in the history of our great state. Our students got a historical lesson in civics while we marveled at the sheer force and power of this giant awoken. Hundreds of thousands filed into our downtown on two separate occasions leaving not so much as a bubble gum wrapper behind - not to mention that not a single arrest was made or disturbance reported. Traffic stalled, businesses closed and people stood jaw-dropped as the wave of workers in white t-shirts sang their way through the city. We will not forget that day.

Jesus said, "...Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world, for I was a stranger and you invited me in. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you a stranger and invite you in?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" We see you Jesus in the face of our undocumented brother paying university level tuition for a community college education. We see you Jesus in the face of the worker who after long, tired days still finds time to organize and coach a soccer league for our kids in the neighborhood. We see you Jesus in the face our battered mom who is afraid to call the police after her husband has abused her in an ugly drunken moment.

We see you Jesus and we don't want to miss this important moment.

*Kit Danley is a recently elected board member for CCDA, and has extensive experience working in the Latino and Native American communities of the Southwest. Ian Danley, has grown up in Neighborhood Ministries, and has become a leading advocate for the undocumented residents of Phoenix, AZ.*

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# Border Politics' Heart of Darkness

By Craig Wong

*When human beings refuse to use God's gift of money responsibly, they are handing their power to Mammon, and he will take control. And when powers take over, human beings get crushed.*

- N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*

*I thoroughly hate the barbarians because they do not respect justice. They continually promulgate harsh laws to show off their prowess. They oppress [our people] and also violate treaties. They examine for hookworms and practice hundreds of despotic acts.*

- Chinese detainee at the Angel Island Immigrant Detention Center, San Francisco, 1920s

My grandmother, at least in one early period of her life, contemplated suicide. Such an impulse was not uncommon among the female peers with whom she shared several months of harsh and humiliating detainment. Held on an island just a few short miles off the longed-for mainland, as many as 500 detainees at a time occupied barracks characterized by unsanitary conditions, poor diet, and cramped living space. Perhaps greater than the physical hardship, however, was the loneliness of separation from loved ones, combined with the despair of repeated failure to satisfy stringent interrogatories for their release. The inability to recall the minutest of details ("How many steps were there to the front door of your house?") or the presence of treatable parasites could instantly terminate one's arduous quest of becoming an American citizen.

Throughout the history of U.S. immigration, the promulgation of harsh laws and barbaric treatment was not confined to processes of entry. Foreigners suffered the imposition of exorbitant mining taxes during the Gold Rush, costly regulations regarding housing rentals, laws that prohibited harmless cultural practices, enforcement dragnets to expel the undocumented and draconian measures like the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese Internment and California's Proposition 187 aimed at Latino immigrants. Legislation was accompanied by informal oppression of all kinds, including ridicule, exploitation and violence. Such social subjugation is exemplified by the experience of the mass famine-related immigration of the Irish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Upon arrival, they quickly fell victim to unscrupulous landlords and employers, forced into squalid shanty-towns, scammed of personal assets, and relegated to the most undesirable jobs.

One can describe America's anti-immigrant pathology in terms of bigotry and racism, but it is economic preservation, or the fear losing "the American way of life," that ultimately sits at the heart of every such episode. Throughout our history, and without exception, immigrants have played the role of scapegoat in times of recession, under-employment, and national insecurity. This, of course, is merely a logical extension of the fact that well-being in our society is evaluated almost solely in terms of material wealth and possession. Described devotionally, America puts its trust in the rewards and virtues of free-market capitalism. Biblically, to put one's trust in anything or anyone other than God is called idolatry.

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- CONTINUED Wong

The inability to recognize our economic idolatry is evident in the immigration policy debate. We are more sensitive to *legality* than *hospitality*. Human beings are reduced to economic commodities, labeled as either assets or threats to the American economy. We affirm “pathways to naturalization” while allowing greater latitude for enforcement agents to detain and deport. Proposals to brand the undocumented as felons, and to criminalize those who extend them mercy, do not faze us. We demonstrate little discomfort with the institutionalization of under-paid foreign labor pools. Lastly, absent from our conversation is the relationship between increased emigration across our militarized borders and the desperate economic conditions created by U.S.-propagated free-trade policies in Latin America. Bowing to the market, our hearts are darkened and we become morally blind. Inevitably, people become dehumanized, and lives are destroyed.

A leader in a well known evangelical organization is right when he maintains that the issue of immigration is not something that defines a (mainstream) evangelical. That he states this fact, however, is not mere assent to the need for issue-prioritization as much as it reflects serious theological (and therefore moral) shortcoming. The disposition of the American evangelical church to pick-and-choose what we care about may be consistent with a pluralistic, democratic society, but it eschews spiritual integrity. Are we not as Christians called to care for the widow, the orphan, the stranger in our midst? Are we at liberty to practice selective obedience and, in so doing, serve more than one Master? It behooves us to ask ourselves how we can so boisterously proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord...while quietly kneeling at the altar of Mammon.

*Craig Wong is a board member for CCDA, and is the Executive Director of Grace Urban Ministries, Inc. in San Francisco, CA. You can contact Craig at [cwong@gum.org](mailto:cwong@gum.org).*

## CCDA Sponsors Immigration Forum in Chicago at La Villita Community Church

Dr. Juan Hernandez, author of the new book on immigration entitled, *The New American Pioneer: Why Are We Afraid of Mexican Immigrants?* was our special guest at a recent immigration forum held on Tuesday night, April 18, 2006.

One hundred CCDA leaders from around the city came out to hear Dr. Hernandez give an update on the progress being made in Washington regarding immigration. As you may recall, great progress was being made in the Senate before Easter, when it looked like a compromise would result in the drafting of new Bill that was very favorable towards helping millions of undocumented immigrants gain legal status within a number of years.

The joy many of us were experiencing proved to be short-lived, and the House and Senate could not agree on the proposals made by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Dr. Hernandez not only helped those that attended the forum to gain a better understanding of the issues, but he shared his wisdom within the context of his Christian faith, which was very encouraging. At one point Dr. Hernandez stated that if he were to die, and go before the Lord today, he was certain that Lord would hold him accountable for how he worked on behalf of the undocumented.

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## Links on Immigration Reform

The following are very helpful links that can provide up to date information related to immigration reform from a Christian perspective:

### Organizational Links

<http://www.churchandimmigration.info>  
<http://peace.mennolink.org/>  
<http://gbgm-umc.org/umcor/news/20060104.cfm>  
<http://www.ecusa.anglican.org/emm.htm>  
[http://www.nhclc.org/about/news/feb2006\\_1.html](http://www.nhclc.org/about/news/feb2006_1.html)  
<http://www.juanhernandez.org/>  
<http://go.sojo.net/campaign/immigration>  
<http://www.wr.org/>  
<http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/Immigration/>  
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Mar2006/Editorial.asp>  
<http://www.justiceforimmigrants.org/>

### Articles

<http://www.covchurch.org/cov/news/item4857.html>  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/114/53.0.html>  
[http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=7192](http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7192)  
<http://www.worldmag.com/articles/11730>  
<http://www.oneplace.com/ministries/BreakPoint/archives.asp?bcd=4/11/2006>  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0604230405apr23,1,3690658.story?track=rss>  
<http://www.immigrationforum.org/documents/PressRoom/InterfaithCIRStatement.pdf>

### Books

[http://www.acton.org/shopping\\_cart/details.php3?item\\_no=417](http://www.acton.org/shopping_cart/details.php3?item_no=417)  
<http://www.juanhernandez.org/>

We invite you to visit a new website called Church and Immigration, that Noel Castellanos, Andy Bales, Juan Hernandez, and others have created to provide the Church with helpful information related to the issue of immigration reform: [www.churchandimmigration.info](http://www.churchandimmigration.info)

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