



Research Report: Policy Advocacy for Immigrants and Refugees

The Episcopal Church has been actively concerned with the [rights of refugees and migrants](#) since the United States opened its borders to the first waves of immigrants from war-torn regimes in the 1930s. Specific advocacy goals change in response to world events, but the Church has a history of conscientious care for the welcome, safety, and support of individuals who immigrate to the United States, particularly those who come as a result of war, persecution, or natural disaster. Members of vulnerable populations, such as women, children, and racial, religious, and other minority groups have been especially elevated in the Church's public advocacy efforts.

The Church's advocacy has grown around three often intertwining categories: political action and governmental advocacy; support for political refugees and sanctuary parishes; and refugee relief and resettlement.

Public Policy Action and Governmental Advocacy

The Episcopal Church has committed to urging the government to "support a [program of generous admissions](#) to the United States," with a special emphasis on refugees from areas for which resettlement is sometimes the only option. This has been the Church's stated policy since the thirties, when General Convention began to call for the loosening of restrictive and racially discriminatory immigration quotas, and to receive the thousands of people flocking to the country from war-torn areas around the world. From the 1930s through the 1950s, the General Convention urged that all immigration laws "be applied [without discrimination to all nations](#)," pointing out that "such racial discrimination does violence to the Christian view of [one humanity under God](#)," and seriously interfered with the Church's ultimate goal to spread the Gospel.

The number of displaced persons grew overwhelmingly after World War II. The 1952 General Convention responded by urging the U.S. President to [appoint a commission](#) to recommend immediate temporary immigration measures, coordinating with the UN and "contributing generously of American help and resources" to address the problem.

The urgency of the problem led the Church to engage in one of its most lasting service ministries with the founding of the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief, now Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD). Born in the Diocese of Southern Ohio, the fund began as a direct advocacy and relief response to European refugees. Refugee and relief work was organized and funded through the [Refugee Resettlement Office](#), which worked with the umbrella ecumenical organization of the Church World Service to reduce duplication and free up money for actual relief work. This work tapped into two historical aspirations: parish commitments to aid the stranger in our midst, and world mission commitments to intercede on behalf of [migrant Anglican Church populations](#). In 1988 Presiding Bishop Browning extracted the legalization programs of ERD and re-established them as today's Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM). From its very inception, [24 dioceses and 55 parishes](#) joined EMM's resettlement efforts.

With the influx of refugees from violence in Southeast Asia in the 1960s, policy advocacy shifted to a local level, to provide an immediate and practical response; nonetheless, the Executive Council continued to monitor and respond to governmental policy on refugee and immigrant issues. In 1979 Council [endorsed](#) a Refugee Act proposing increased immigration quotas, and an [Episcopal presence](#) was sent to the 1979 United Nations Refugee Conference. In 1980 Presiding Bishop Allin personally requested President Carter to [accept Haitian refugees](#), and the Church joined the NCC in [opposing the removal of rights](#) for migrant and undocumented workers proposed by the Reagan government.

In the last three triennia alone, the Church has been visible and vocal in advocating for [reform of refugee and immigration policies](#). General Convention has called for clearing [paths to citizenship](#), [protecting immigrants](#) fleeing violence and abuse, respecting equal immigration rights for [same-sex partners](#), [ending racial profiling](#) and unjust immigration enforcement, and [supporting the DREAM Act](#).

Through the Episcopal Public Policy Network (EPPN) and other social justice networks, concerned Episcopalians have rallied to the Convention's challenge to keep political leaders and legislators constantly alert to the plight of refugees and immigrants nationally and in their own districts. The Episcopal Church's Office of Government Relations in Washington meets with lawmakers to speak on behalf of the Convention and many individuals on these and other important matters.

Political Refugees and Sanctuary Parishes

While most of the Church's work has focused on displacement and immigration resulting from unlivable physical or economic conditions, we have also concerned ourselves with protecting political refugees, political prisoners, and refugees who face near-certain death if sent home. The Church sponsored a 1980 "[Freedom Flight](#)," airlifting 34 Cuban political prisoners to the U.S., and in 1983 the Episcopal Center at the University of Wisconsin became what is believed to be the [first Episcopal sanctuary parish](#), sheltering refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador who believed they would face death squads if they were deported.

General Convention and Executive Council have consistently [supported sanctuary ministries](#) and have called on Episcopalians to engage in them if they feel able. As recently as last Convention, Resolution [2015-D057](#) was adopted, recommitting the Church to giving sanctuary to immigrants.

Relief and Resettlement

Resettlement work, though organized nationally, was and is conducted largely on a parish and diocesan level. Throughout the sixties, parishes across the U.S. sponsored Cuban families, finding them homes, job training, and English classes. In one year alone, the Episcopal Church settled [4,000 Cubans](#) with parish assistance.

Aid was given to refugees from Romania, Egypt, Yugoslavia, and other countries. Increasingly through the 1970s, the Church focused on the growing numbers of refugees from the Vietnam War, the so-called "boat people" who risked their lives on the China Sea to escape war and persecution. The Episcopal News Service helped to disseminate [Church-wide calls](#) for parish support. Diocesan commissions set up on the West Coast coordinated aid and resettlement, and thousands of families were resettled with aid from parishes around the country.

Since then, EMM has worked in conjunction with other organizations in the Anglican Communion and the World Council of Churches to coordinate relief and resettlement efforts. EMM was particularly successful in the 1980s to 2000s, working with Immigration and Naturalization Services to help immigrants to obtain legal status. [Tens of thousands](#) of immigrants were [aided through this program](#).

The Episcopal Church has produced a number of resources to guide parishes and individuals through the process of sponsoring and aiding refugees, notably the *Anchor of Hope* series. Today's advocacy for immigrants and refugees stems directly from [General Convention's principles](#), which guide official policy on immigration. The Episcopal Church stands committed to reasonable pathways to citizenship and work for immigrants; the reunification of families separated by migration; due process for all persons; and fair enforcement of immigration policies and frontier borders. The Church's commitment to advocate for the vulnerable with legislative action and community networking and to welcome the stranger with love and openness continues into the 2018 triennium.

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