

## Arizona Institute for Public Life

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### *What is the Truth about Proposition 200?*

# **Proposition 200: Reflection on *Faith-Based Principles on Immigration*, by AZ Judicatory Heads & Clergy**

Arizona's economy, culture, and policies, and even popular piety and worship practices, are influenced by immigration. Hardly exclusive to our state or times, immigration has been a feature of the entire continent from the beginning of evangelization to our present day. It presents challenges which we have seen our federal immigration system is unable to meet. Every day, thousands of families make our lives easier and more affordable by cooking in our restaurants, cleaning and maintaining our offices and resorts, landscaping our parks, building our homes and growing our food. Their hard work and contributions most often go unnoticed. They tolerate substandard housing with inadequate nourishment, health care, and education for their children. And yet they continue to risk their lives to get here. Clearly we need better, not more harmful and divisive, laws in our state.

As people of faith, we are called to recognize that "the contribution of immigrants to the State of Arizona and the United States of America is rich, varied, and constructive. We should embrace these contributions and protect the human rights of those who make them (AZ Judicatory Heads & Clergy *Statement on Immigration*, 4/19/04\*\*).

As we must protect our borders, so must other countries take responsibility for the welfare of their citizens, providing them opportunities to live a decent life in their country of birth. However, our faith leaders agree that "when persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to migrate elsewhere to find work elsewhere in order to survive" (Ibid.).

The original proponents of "Protect Arizona Now" argue that illegal immigration is "an invasion" and "the destruction of America as we know it." Their proposition does nothing to further the economy, security or unity of this state. Although voting is already illegal for non-citizens and there is no proof of material voter fraud, it aims to impose more restrictions at the polls at a time when Arizona's voting rate is the sixth lowest in the country. It would also require state, city and county workers, and any others distributing public benefits, to cooperate with immigration authorities by verifying citizenship of applicants and reporting violations in writing. Failure to file such reports would result in criminal charges.

This initiative clearly goes against our faith traditions' social mission, which begins by addressing the most urgent needs through direct services and acts of charity, but must also include uncovering the roots of evil and proposing initiatives to make our society more just and peaceful. The proponents of Proposition 200 are using the citizen initiative process to harden the hearts, not improve the laws, of Arizona.

While there are no simple solutions to this complex problem, it may help to reflect on the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Rather than narrowly defining "neighbor" to include those who look like us or live in our socio-economic class, our faith traditions demand of each individual an attitude of respect for the dignity of others and of real concern for them, even if they are strangers. What does this demand mean for us? Recognizing that there are immigrants among us and that many will continue to come, we, as congregations, "have a special responsibility to reach out to and welcome our brothers and sisters as members of God's family. This is a blessing and also a challenge" (Ibid.). The challenge of fostering a welcoming attitude means we cannot remain idle. It means we must speak out on behalf of those without a voice and against any divisive rhetoric. It means we must vote against propositions harmful to our families and neighbors, and ultimately, contrary to our faith.

\*\*Judicatory Heads & Clergy at 4/19/04 convocation:

Bishop Dew, Southwest Annual Conference UMC; Rev. Flaaten, Arizona Ecumenical Council; Bishop Kicanas, Diocese of Tucson; Bishop Neils, Grand Canyon Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church; Bishop Olmsted, Diocese of Phoenix; Rev. Rogers-Witte, Southwest Conference UCC; Bishop Smith, Arizona Episcopal Church; Rabbi Straus, Temple Emanuel

***"For the LORD, your God,... executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt."***  
— Deut 10:18-19