



Research Report: Policy Advocacy for Families and Young People

The Episcopal Church’s advocacy on behalf of refugees and immigrants has always implicitly included concern for families, but since the turn of the millennium, the Church’s policy statements have explicitly elevated the special needs of immigrant families and youth. This heightened attention was a response to anti-immigrant sentiment and tightened U.S. immigration policies enacted in the 1990s. Aggressive enforcement procedures such as [raids](#) on workplaces and community gathering places, the use of “[family](#)” detention centers, [profile policing](#), and the deportation of legal immigrants for minor offenses were a constant [threat to families](#) with separation as the ultimate penalty.

The Episcopal Church has resisted blanket governmental restrictions on immigration and harsh enforcement practices. In [2006](#) and [2009](#), General Convention expressed most clearly and comprehensively the Church’s support for immigration laws that allow refugees with close family members living legally in the United States to reunite with them without undue delay. Since then, the Church’s advocacy has focused on reform of U.S. immigration policies while calling on Episcopalians at every level to provide increased support for immigrant families and youth. Some local advocacy efforts were already underway in parish and diocesan [Jubilee Centers](#) that receive funding through the Executive Council. Other efforts are new or represent renewed commitments to earlier practices, such as the giving of [Sanctuary](#).

The 2012 Convention encouraged congregations, dioceses, and provinces to locate or [develop scholarship funds](#) and encourage undocumented youth who do not qualify for the usual federal, state, and private scholarships to apply for them. In 2015, the General Convention asked the Episcopal Church’s whole mission staff to search for such scholarships, especially for minorities, and to explore the feasibility of [creating an Episcopal scholarship](#) for this purpose in which dioceses could also participate.

The local church is a crucial bridge in advocating for the protection of new members of the wider American family. General Convention has encouraged parishes to [give their material support](#) to immigrant families and youth. Specifically, budgetary funds were authorized to assist congregations in sharing with undocumented individuals and families knowledge of their legal rights and access to psychological, financial, and spiritual support.

General Convention recently recommitted to the physical protection of refugees and other immigrants by endorsing the offer of sanctuary. Creditable parishes are encouraged to be [centers](#) of information, services, and accompaniment for immigrants and a support to families that face separation “in the absence of comprehensive, humane, immigration reform.” By 2017, news reports brought attention to the personal terror of family separation by covering the decision of [Holyrood Parish](#) in Manhattan to provide sanctuary to an undocumented mother and her American-born children.

Current advocacy initiatives focus on the elimination of harsh enforcement policies and the development of pathways to legalization for undocumented persons. In [2009](#), the General Convention called for a moratorium on roadside checkpoints and raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that lead

to the separation of families and leave children without parents. Further, the Convention specifically stated its support for provision of [conditional legal status](#) for undocumented youth who came to the United States as children and for a pathway to citizenship for them. The 2012 Convention continued in this direction by expressing [support for the DREAM Act](#), which protects the right of today's young resident immigrants to fulfill a legal path to full American citizenship, a path that historically has been offered to other new Americans.

In 2015, the General Convention [reaffirmed support](#) for immigration reform and for federal policies designed to keep families together, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA) executive actions. General Convention also called for an immediate end to the practice of detaining women who arrive in the U.S. with minor children (a concern that arose in the context of immigration from Central America) and supported the [automatic granting of citizenship](#) by the country in which a person is born, especially in countries where the Church has dioceses.

Date: May 25, 2018