Our Faith has its roots in Migration

# Biblical Perspectives

The Christian faith is a faith with its roots in migration. God calls Abraham and Sarah to leave their homeland and migrate across the Near East and later appears to them as a nomadic stranger to reaffirm the promise of a son. For three generations their family lives as semi-nomadic migrants before travelling to Egypt as a consequence of famine. In Egypt the immigrant Israelites are exploited and oppressed until God brought them out and accompanied them to an already inhabited land. David, Israel’s greatest King, is portrayed as the decedent of the Moabite migrant Ruth and he received asylum for a time from the Philistines. Centuries later the Israelites were conquered, many people are forced into exile and others flee to neighboring lands. Even when some of the Israelites returned to their own land the majority remained as foreigners in other lands

In the New Testament Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus mentions four women, two Canaanites, one Moabite and one who was the wife of a Hittite. As an infant Jesus and his parents were forced to flee a despotic ruler and survived as refugees in Egypt. Jesus grew up and become a wandering homeless preacher whose life ended with his being rejected by the leaders of his own people, handed over to the foreign occupiers, and crucified outside the city thus symbolically excluded from Israel. The resurrection is the declaration that this excluded and degraded person is the ultimate revelation of God in history. In the incarnation God migrated in this way into the world humanity to save and redeem. The Son of God journeyed from the presence of the Father into the distant country where he set up his tent amongst us.

The message of the gospel was then carried throughout the world by wondering preachers. People from different cultures, nationalities and religious backgrounds responded to their message. Through faith in Christ they became part of the people of God whose unity transcended the divisions of the old creation. They understood themselves to be strangers and migrants who owed their primary loyalty to the crucified Christ and not to the Roman imperial authorities or the traditions of their own people.

These roots in migration are expressed in Old Testament laws which, in contrast to the laws of the surrounding nations, emphasize the rights of migrants and the duty of the Israelites to care for them. In the messages of some of the prophets, the treatment of migrants became a test of Israel’s faithfulness to God.

In the New Testament the Church was called to be hospitable. They should be a community which demonstrates God’s welcome to all people. In the same way Christians in the contemporary context of mass migration Christians are called to express our faith’s roots in migration through a particular concern for migrants.

# The Contemporary Context

Mass migration is a characteristic of the Twenty First Century. There are over 232 Million people world-wide living outside of their home country and of these there are about 73 Million are in Europe. Many of those in Europe are people from other European countries. People migrate to other countries for many different reasons while we are called to be hospitable to the stranger what that involves will depend will be shaped by an analysis of the reasons why they have migrated. We name the following eight reasons for migration

1. **Refugees and Asylum seekers** – people who flee their home country as a consequence of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or for their political opinions. (United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees). Such people have particular rights under international law including the right to asylum and the right not to be returned to their country of origin while the threat persists. In addition, the Swiss Asylum Law states: Switzerland may grant temporary protection to persons in need of protection as long as they are exposed to a serious general danger, in particular during a war or civil war as well as in situations of general violence. There are similar provisions in European Union law.
2. **Trafficked people** – people who are brought from their home countries under false pretences or are coerced into moving through the threat of violence or the use of forces. Such people are subjected to the control of others and forced to engage in exploitative forms of work. Victims of trafficking are usually granted a special status when they situation is uncovered and the perpetrators are subjected to legal sanction. In Switzerland the most common form of trafficking is related to the sex trade.
3. **Survival Migrants** – people who leave their country as a consequence of a threat to their wellbeing and that of their families as a consequence of severe economic failure or environmental disasters. This leads to severe unemployment, food insecurity, unrest or other similar situations. Such migrants often leave to find essential financial resources to continue to provide for families who remain in their home countries. At present international law makes no particular provision for such migrants who are often placed in the general category of economic migrants.
4. **Migrant Laborers** – people who leave their own country for a limited period of time to obtain work in another country – it can include amongst others domestic, construction and farm workers. In some cases, this involves contracts with specific businesses or through labor brokers. Such workers are often vulnerable and can easily be exploited. They lack the protections enjoyed by other workers in the host countries.
5. **Economic Migrants** – people who move to another country to improve their economic wellbeing. It can include a vast range of range of economic contexts and situations from people who leave can survive in their own countries but who want to provide for themselves and their families. At the other end of the spectrum are those who live relatively well in their home countries but the work but find far better working situations in the host country.
6. **“Love Migrants”** – mostly women than also men, who out of love or an arranged marriage live out their partnership in a foreign country. Often these partnerships are relationships of dependency, this is often increased by the laws relating to foreigners in the host country.
7. **Expats** – highly qualified people who are recruited for well paid jobs in large multinational companies and who move to a foreign country usually for a limited period of time.
8. **Tax refugees** – these are extremely wealthy people who have moved to a foreign country as a means of in avoiding higher taxes in their own countries.

In developing a response to the issue of migration we need to take note of the following.

* The diversity of reasons for migration should give rise to different responses.
* The legal status of migrants has an impact not only on how they are treated by the state and but also on their vulnerability to exploitation.
* Migrants within EU and EFTA countries are subjected to different treatment than those that come from without,
* Migration is often portrayed as problem in a way that does not take account for the significant social, cultural and economic contribution of migrants.

# Ethical Guidelines

The Christian faith’s roots in migration ought to shape the ethical response to the issue of migration. Our Methodist tradition also adds particular dimensions to this response. John Wesley argued that human beings were created to reflect the righteousness of God. He summarized this as a fundamental orientation of love for our neighbors. This orientation is expressed in lifestyle characterized by justice, mercy and truth. Further he was convinced that are stewards of God. All we are and have comes from God. It is held in trust and by us and is s to be used in accordance with God’s intention – that is in accordance with of justice, mercy and truth. We are accountable before God for how we use it.

Injustice, cruelty and falsehood are the expression of human sin. However, through prevenient grace God enables all people to be and to act in accordance justice, mercy and truth. The center of Wesley’s theology was that through the empowering and transforming work of the Spirit. Christians are being transformed so that their lives give greater expression to justice mercy and truth. This process of transformation involves both the work of the Spirit and our response in actions of love to others. Christians and the Christian community are called to respond to migration in a way that is characterized by justice mercy and truth.

# Truth

Any response to the challenge of migration must be based on truth yet in our contemporary context reports on migration are often characterized by half-truths, inadequate information, superficial analysis, propaganda and, in some cases, deliberate misinformation:

* + We therefore call on the news media to engage in accurate as possible reporting that provides an adequate analysis of the causes and consequences of migration.
  + We therefore call on the news media, politicians, officials and other people of influence to reject the negative stereotyping of migrants.
  + We therefore call on political leaders not to promote propaganda and misinformation on migration for political purposes.
  + We therefore call on governments and authorities base their strategies and lawmaking on adequate analysis of the causes and consequences of migration.
  + We therefore call on government leaders and officials to take into account the wellbeing of migrants, their countries of origin and their host countries in their political work.
  + We therefore call on the church and its media to use its international and ecumenical resources to promote an informed and accurate account as possible of migration. It should be recognizable that the church is a community that transcends international boundaries that reflects its perspective as transnational community. In this way it lives out its responsibility of being a faithful steward of God’s gifts in the world.
  + We therefore call on the church to exercise a prophetic ministry in exposing the involvement governments, transnational businesses and financial institutions in creating the situations that lead to migration; examples of this include the weapons trade, investments and business practices that promote profit at the expense of people and the environment, the support of oppressive governments, and polluting industries and products that contribute to climate change.
  + We therefore call on the church to use all its resources to overcome xenophobia in the church and the state.

# Justice

Justice requires that we treat all human beings with dignity and respect regardless of national origin or legal status. In the Bible justice has a particular focus on those who vulnerable, who suffer, who are disadvantaged and excluded. Migrants are used, in the bible, as a prime example of a disadvantaged and vulnerable group so that Israel’s commitment to justice is evaluated by its treatment of migrants.

* We therefore call on the states and its officials to treat migrants with justice. We recognize that governments have a particular responsibility to provide for the well-being their country and its citizens this cannot be at the expense of justice for other parts of the population (e.g. migrants). We therefore call for the repeal of laws and policies that:
  + unjustifiably discriminate against people because of their national origin.
  + treat criminals differently because of their nationality.
  + that deliberately favor well resources migrants particularly tax refugees.
  + that discriminate and alienate people because of their national origin, religion or culture.
* We therefore call on states to develop policies and practices that promote the integration of migrants into the society. Such policies and practices should:
  + respects differences in culture and religion
  + support the obtaining of necessary skills to participate in society.
  + remove unnecessary barriers obtaining citizenship particularly to people born in the host country.
* We therefore call on states to express solidarity in sharing the burden of receiving and providing for refugees.
* We therefore call on states to require that international firms and financial institutions implement practices that are equivalent to those required by the legal frameworks their home countries thus reducing the causes of migration.
* We call on states to reject military intervention in order to prevent the development of new situations that lead to forced migration.
* We therefore call on states to combat all forms of human trafficking and to develop policies that provide for the victims of trafficking.
* We therefore call on states to implement laws and policies that prevent the economic exploitation of migrants.
* We therefore call on the church and on Christians to respond to migration in a way that expresses their membership of God’s reign. The reign of God comprises people from all nations. Hence within the church justice requires the rejection of any discrimination on the basis of nationality or origin. As a consequence churches as a consequence of this reality be prepared to act in contradiction of the society and the state and to exemplify justice.
* We therefore call on the church to defend the rights of excluded and disadvantaged migrants.
* We therefore call on the church to develop programs which help migrants to integrate into the host society.
* We therefore call on the church and its members to support political policies that promote justice for migrants.

# Mercy

Mercy goes beyond justice to express a particular concern to relieve the suffering of those who disadvantaged, excluded and vulnerable. In relation to migration it requires a particular concern to overcome the suffering of refugees, asylum seekers, trafficked people, survival migrants, migrant laborers and economic migrants who have limited resources.

* We therefore call on states to fulfil all its obligations under international law to refugees and asylum seekers and to extend these special protections and provisions to survival migrants.
* We therefore call on states no to build walls and fences but rather to dismantle borders
* We therefore call on to develop policies and practices that enable refugees, asylum seekers and survival migrants to apply for refugee or asylum status in or near their countries of origin thus enabling them to travel securely to their country of destination.
* We therefore call on states organizations and churches as well as individuals to, develop policies that protect exploited and abused migrants in particular the victims of trafficking.
* We therefore call on To the church to develop programs of hospitality to for disadvantaged, excluded and vulnerable migrants; including:
  + The promotion of relationships with migrants
  + Language learning
  + Trauma Counselling and other psychological help
  + Assistance in integrating into the labor market
  + Emergency food, shelter and financial aid

# Working together with other churches and organizations

We understand this statement as supplementing and affirming other important statements. So we also recommend reading and taking note of the following documents:

* The European Methodist Council: "Die Nächsten kennenlernen". Botschaft des Europäischen Rats Methodistischer Kirchen zu den aktuellen Herausforderungen durch Flüchtlinge. Bulgarien, 15. September 2015

http://www.methodist.eu

* "Mitbürger und Hausgenossen…" Ein Wort des Kirchenvorstands der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche in Deutschland zu Flüchtlingen und Kirchenasyl. Stuttgart, 15. November 2014

http://www.emk.de/fileadmin/meldungen-2014/141119-Fluechtlinge-und-Kirchenasyl.pdf

* Migrationscharta. Freie Niederlassung für alle: Willkommen in einer solidarischen Gesellschaft! Grundsätze einer neuen Migrationspolitik aus biblisch-theologischer Perspektive.

http://neuemigrationspolitik.ch

* Schweizerischer Evangelischer Kirchenbund: Sorgt für das Recht! 2015, Veröffentlicht am 10. Dezember 2015 zum internationalen Tag der Menschenrechte.

www.kirchenbund.ch

* Conference of European Churches Governing Board Brussels, 8 – 10 June 2016. Public Issues Statement: "A Europe that protects and welcomes"   
  http://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/CEC-GB-June-2016-Public-Issues-FINAL.pdf

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