

# **A RESOLUTION CALLING THE HAWAI‘I CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO OPPOSE THE 2025 IMMIGRATION ROLLBACKS AND SUPPORT IMMIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND PACIFIC ISLAND COMMUNITIES**

**Submitted to the 203rd ‘Aha Pae‘āina of the Hawai‘i Conference United Church of Christ in coordination with the emergency resolution submitted to the 35th General Synod of the United Church of Christ by the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries (COREM)**

## **SUMMARY**

This resolution calls on the Hawai‘i Conference United Church of Christ to strongly oppose the immigration policy rollbacks of the 2025 Trump Administration and urges the church to support and protect immigrant communities, particularly from Pacific Islander and Asian American backgrounds, many of whom are facing heightened threats of deportation, family separation, and the dismantling of long-standing protections under United States and international law.

## **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

Scripture continually testifies to God’s command to welcome the stranger and uphold the dignity of all people, regardless of nationality or legal status. In Leviticus 19:33 to 34, the Israelites are commanded, “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself.” In Matthew 25:35, Jesus tells us that when we welcome the stranger, we welcome him. Jesus himself was a refugee, as Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt to protect him from political violence as recorded in Matthew 2:13 to 15.

The theological imperative is clear. Our faith requires us to speak out against injustice, especially toward those marginalized by systems of oppression and xenophobia. The Imago Dei, or image of God in every person, calls us to resist any policies or practices that diminish the worth of our siblings in Christ.

In keeping with this theological mandate, the 34th General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted the 2023 resolution “Calling on United Church of Christ Local Churches to Witness ‘A White Supremacy Free Zone’ and Confronting White Supremacy,” affirming that dismantling white supremacy is a spiritual imperative and calling all congregations, especially those of predominantly European descent, to engage in public witness, study, and transformative action.

Historically, the United Church of Christ has stood for the rights of immigrants and refugees. In 2007, the UCC General Synod declared the church an “Immigrant Welcoming Church,” committing itself to active engagement in immigrant justice ministries. We reaffirm this legacy and its particular application to immigrants of Pacific Islander and Asian American heritage, who

have historically faced discriminatory laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. Today, communities including Filipinos, Southeast Asians, and Micronesians continue to be disproportionately impacted by deportation and criminalization, despite being vital contributors to American society and the UCC.

The Hawai‘i Conference of the United Church of Christ traces its roots to the Hawaiian Evangelical Association, established in 1853 out of earlier Native-led Christian movements. The association cultivated a uniquely Hawaiian expression of faith grounded in local leadership, cultural identity, and a commitment to justice. In 1959, it formally became the Hawai‘i Conference of the United Church of Christ. From 1852 to 1909, more than thirty-eight Hawaiian families served as missionaries across Micronesia, including the Caroline, Marshall, and Gilbert Islands. These efforts forged enduring relationships rooted in shared Pacific Islander identity and faith. Today, many Micronesian communities in Hawai‘i continue to worship in UCC congregations, carrying forward this legacy of interisland solidarity and spiritual kinship.

In addition to its mission work abroad, the Hawaiian Evangelical Association also played a vital role in ministering to immigrant communities in Hawai‘i, including Japanese and Filipino laborers during the plantation era. Churches such as Waipahu Evangelical Church, founded in 1929 to serve Filipino sugar workers, and Waipahu Community Church, established in 1938 to support Japanese youth and families, offered spiritual care, education, and social services rooted in Christian compassion and aloha. In 1961, these two congregations united to form Waipahu United Church of Christ, embodying the multicultural foundation of the church in Hawai‘i. This legacy of inclusive ministry continues to shape the Conference’s commitment to immigrant and working-class communities across the islands.

The Conference also holds a long and significant history of ministry with Chinese communities in Hawai‘i, reflecting its early dedication to culturally responsive and inclusive faith leadership. In 1879, Chinese Christians in Honolulu petitioned the Hawaiian Evangelical Association to establish a congregation that would provide worship in their native language. This led to the founding of the First Chinese Church of Christ in Hawai‘i. On Hawai‘i Island, this work expanded with the founding of the Hilo Chinese Church in 1897, now known as Hilo United Community Church. Together, these congregations represent the Conference’s enduring commitment to serving diverse communities with dignity, cultural respect, and faith in action.

## **TEXT OF THE RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, President Donald J. Trump rescinded multiple immigration protections beginning his first week in office in January 2025, including the Sensitive Locations Guidance, the CHNV humanitarian parole program, and other asylum protections;

**WHEREAS**, according to the ACLU of Hawai‘i, at least 20 undocumented immigrants were arrested in Hawai‘i in the first week of Trump’s administration in 2025, instilling fear among the 41,000 to 51,000 undocumented immigrants residing in the state, approximately half of whom are of Filipino descent;

**WHEREAS**, data from AAPI Data and Asian Americans Advancing Justice indicate that Asian Americans are the fastest-growing undocumented population in the United States, with over 1.7 million undocumented individuals, and Pacific Islanders are disproportionately criminalized and deported due to racialized policing and lack of legal access;

**WHEREAS**, the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* reported on February 6, 2025, that Fiji’s Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka warned the U.S. Congressional Pacific Islands Caucus that the deportation of Pacific Islanders with criminal convictions from the United States posed a serious public safety risk for Pacific Island nations, which are unequipped to support returnees with gang and drug activity records;

**WHEREAS**, the Compacts of Free Association allow citizens from the Federated States of Micronesia including Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau to live and work legally in the United States, yet community members are being caught up in enforcement actions and ICE raids despite these rights, as confirmed by the ACLU and multiple Pacific Island government representatives;

**WHEREAS**, an April 8, 2025 *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* investigation found that ICE is now detaining COFA migrants across Hawai‘i who have merely been arrested, even without formal charges, and some have been deported years after completing minor sentences, separating them from their United States citizen children;

**WHEREAS**, though the First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects the right to free speech and to petition the government for redress of grievances for everyone in the country regardless of immigration status, many immigrants including green card holders and those on student visas have been arrested under threat of deportation for expressing dissent of Trump Administration policies and actions;

**WHEREAS**, recent reports from *Hawai‘i Public Radio* and other national sources reveal that lawful permanent residents, including green card holders, have been detained, denied re-entry at ports of entry, or placed in removal proceedings without due process under the 2025 immigration rollbacks, deepening fear and instability among immigrant communities;

**WHEREAS**, the United Church of Christ Office of Public Policy and Advocacy has condemned these rollbacks and emphasized that they contradict our theological understanding of the Imago Dei, the belief that all people are made in the image of God;

**WHEREAS**, immigration attorneys and federal public defenders report that COFA migrants face a higher risk of removal with fewer legal protections than green card holders, especially under the Trump Administration’s intensified immigration enforcement;

**WHEREAS**, U.S. Representative Ed Case, chair of the Congressional Pacific Islands Caucus, and Hawai‘i lawmakers including Representative Greggor Ilagan have fast-tracked bills to limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities and protect immigrant families from unjust detention and deportation in public schools, hospitals, and places of worship. Representative Jill Tokuda added, “There is a fear in doing such basic things. Our COFA brothers and sisters are part of our community”;

**WHEREAS**, the Justice and Witness Missional Team of the Hawai‘i Conference UCC recognizes that the Conference and Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries (PAAM) of the United Church of Christ represent many communities profoundly impacted by these policies including but not limited to Filipinos, Fijians, Tongans, Samoans, Micronesians, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Southeast Asian Americans and whose members contribute to the fabric of American religious, civic, and cultural life;

**WHEREAS**, the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries (COREM), including Colectivo de UCC Latinx Ministries, United Black Christians, the Council for American Indian Ministries, Ministers for Racial Social and Economic Justice (MRSEJ), and United Samoan Ministries, have a shared history of confronting white supremacy and state violence that intersects with this current immigration crisis;

**WHEREAS**, the 34th General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopted the 2023 resolution “Calling on United Church of Christ Local Churches to Witness ‘A White Supremacy Free Zone’ and Confronting White Supremacy,” which calls on all settings of the church, especially congregations of predominantly European descent, to confront the idolatry of white supremacy, publicly declare their commitment to racial justice, and engage in study, self-reflection, and transformative action;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, That the 203rd ‘Aha Pae‘āina of the Hawai‘i Conference United Church of Christ calls upon all settings of the church to oppose the 2025 Trump Administration immigration policy rollbacks and condemn any efforts to deny sanctuary, access to services, or human dignity to migrants, immigrants, and refugees;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Justice and Witness Missional Team be tasked to support additional training, workshops, and educational opportunities for individuals and congregations including but not limited to organizing pastoral care, legal education, community education, Know Your Rights trainings, accompaniment ministries, and sanctuary efforts for vulnerable immigrant communities in partnership with other immigrant-supporting organizations;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Hawai‘i Conference UCC takes action to educate and inform its General Synod delegates about immigration and the parallel version of this resolution that is hoped to be presented at the 35th General Synod in July 2025;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Justice and Witness Missional Team partner, collaborate, and communicate with the Micronesian Committee of the Hawai‘i Conference UCC to be present for and supportive of our Micronesian siblings in Christ and pay careful attention to the needs and stressors of the Micronesian community, especially with regard to the impact of COFA migration status;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 203rd ‘Aha Pae‘āina urges support for local and state legislation that protects immigrant rights, ensures due process, prevents collaboration with ICE by local law enforcement, and prohibits the use of public land for immigration detention facilities;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the 203rd ‘Aha Pae‘āina encourages every local church, including individuals in their own communities, to become active in Immigrant Welcoming Ministries, to offer legal and moral sanctuary, to support legal defense funds, and to speak prophetically, especially those with the privilege of being documented, against fear-based immigration enforcement policies that separate families and cause undue suffering.

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

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