Citizen Times

Opinion: Western North Carolina faith leaders call on community to support immigrants

Rev. Sara Wilcox Guest Opinion

Nov. 2, 2025, 5:08 a.m. ET

As pastors, rabbis and leaders of faith-based organizations rooted here in Western North Carolina, we represent a diversity of religious traditions and beliefs. We are united in our commitment to God's teaching to Love Thy Neighbor. Today we call on our wider community to put these intentions into action by prioritizing the ethic of love for ALL our neighbors, and in particular, our immigrant neighbors.

As a policy matter, immigration is a complex issue, on which neighbors may disagree. As people of faith, however, we agree to basic tenets that unite us across our diverse traditions, across any politics. We believe that all people are Beloved Children of God, important and vital members of our community, and deserving of the full enjoyment of human rights and human dignity, regardless of race, nationality, language, or immigration status. We believe in welcoming the stranger, providing asylum for those fleeing violence in their own countries, caring for the vulnerable among us, and standing against injustice. In short, we believe in loving one's neighbor, regardless of homeland or address.

The devastation of Hurricane Helene showed us that despite all of our differences and the diversity in these mountains, we know how to show up for our neighbors. We know how to come together to care for one another, to make sure everyone has their basic needs met, to ensure that everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity. In the bold and beautiful acts of love following Helene, no one asked for anyone's ID or immigration papers before extending a hand. Many of our immigrant neighbors became community heroes both during the pandemic and post Helene, supporting rapid response and rebuilding.

communities by demonizing and dehumanizing our immigrant neighbors. The danger is not unbridled floodwaters, but overreaching policies that terrorize communities and separate families from their loved ones. The danger is not failing dams and bridges, but unaccountable and failing institutions that are bending to strip away basic protections from all of us — citizens and non-citizens alike.

Parents are afraid to leave for work, fearing they may not see their families again. Children are afraid to go to school, fearing they may be taken by masked men while walking to football practice. Our faith in our democratic ideals and institutions, in the rule of law, in the humanity of every person is being tested.

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Now is the time when we lean on our faith traditions to embolden us to rise to this test. Today we invite faith leaders and people of faith across our region to come together to shift the narratives that are harming immigrant families in our region and beyond. The time to speak up and use our voices is now.

We seek first, to make a clear visible commitment to love thy neighbor — ALL our neighbors. We offer a collective public statement for institutions to consider in defense of immigrant rights, and you will see “Love Thy Neighbor — Defend Immigrant Rights” banners and yard signs outside many of our places of worship and outside our homes.

We also seek to breathe life into our faith through concrete action. Our sacred texts call us to love our neighbors. We do this through the care of foreigners as if they were native-born, through provisions of hospitality for strangers, and by seeing the imprint of God on every person before us and in need. We commit to mobilize our faith communities and our collective resources toward these important truths.

We will stand with our immigrant neighbors through advocacy, accompaniment, and mutual aid. We commit to do this work in coordination with and following the

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Our faith calls us to Love our Neighbors. We have seen WNC stand together with ALL our neighbors; we know what is possible. We invite faith institutions and people of faith across the region to join with us by visiting www.lovethyneighborwnc.org.

Asheville Friends Meeting
Pastor Samuel Burleson, Co-Pastor at Covenant Community Church, UMC
Rev. Kate Mosley, Parish Associate for Youth, Rumple Memorial Presbyterian Church, Blowing Rock
Rev. Casey Callahan
Rev. Amy Cantrell, Beloved Asheville
Rev. Paula Clayton Dempsey, Mars Hill
The Rev. Dr. Mack Dennis, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church of Asheville
The Rev. Dr. Audette Fulbright Fulson, Lead Minister, UU Asheville
Rev. Vicki Garlock
Rev. David Germer
Pastor Phillip Gibson
Rev. Missy Harris
The Rev George Grimm-Howell, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hendersonville, NC
Rev. Carrilea Hall, North Carolina Council of Churches
Rev Liz Harris-Lamkin, Health Care Chaplain, Retired
The Very Rev. Sarah Hurlbert, Dean of the Cathedral of All Souls
Jubilee! Community
The Rev. Claudia Jimènez, Unitarian Universalist
The Rev. Naomi King, Retired Pastor, UMC
Rabbi Sandra Lawson, Executive Director of Carolina Jews For Justice
Rabbi Mitchell Levine, Congregation Beth Israel
Rev. Dustin Mailman, Deep Time
Rev. Brian Martinez de la Combs, Haywood Street Congregation
The Rev Erin Maxfield-Steele, St. John's Episcopal Church, Sylva

Rabbi Batsheva A. Mehr

The Rev. Karla Miller, Pastor, First Congregational UCC, Hendersonville, NC

The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor/Head of Staff, Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, Asheville, NC

John Dempsey Parker, Partnerships Director, NC Council of Churches and board member, Repairers of the Breach, Asheville

The Rev. Elizabeth Rawlings, Community of Spiritual Practice

The Rev. Mary Katherine Robinson

The Rev. Dr. Steve Runholt

Pastor Bruce Schoup, Lead Pastor, Interim, First Congregational UCC, Asheville

Rev. Chad Smith, House of Mercy

Rev. Shannon Spencer

The Rev. Kimberleigh Wells

The Rev. Sara Wilcox, Pastor, Land of the Sky United Church of Christ, Asheville

The Rev. Stan Wilson, Co-Pastor, Circle of Mercy Congregation

The Rev. Meghan Young, Congregational Church of Tryon

Rev. Tami Forte Logan, M.Div., Faith 4 Justice Asheville

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