

Do Baptists Prioritize Refugees Over the Undocumented?

Are U.S. Baptists more receptive to refugees from other countries than the undocumented in their own country?

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) was meeting and the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) had met recently, when the Supreme Court failed to support President Obama's immigration plan that would shield 4 million undocumented immigrants from being deported. The court ended in a 4-4 tie.

The court's vote kicked the immigration reform can down the road until after the 2016 presidential election.

Donald Trump promises to build a wall between the United States and Mexico. Hillary Clinton promises a quick overhaul of immigration working with Republicans. Obama is sometimes called the "king of deportation" because [more Hispanics have been deported](#) annually during his administration than that of President George W. Bush.

American politicians can't seem to agree on how to reform the broken immigration system. That's been true for too long.

Perhaps what is new is what two national Baptists bodies did or didn't do around the issue of immigration.

Meeting in Greensboro (June 20-24), the word immigration did not appear in the title of any CBF workshop. Current issue topics included payday lending, the death penalty, listening to millennials, economic issues facing pastors, diversity. A number of workshops looked at relationships between blacks and white. Of course, the most talked about CBF issue was its announced LGBTQ study.

CBF did offer several workshops related to refugees, however.

The Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution, titled [On Refugee Ministry](#), at its 2016 annual meeting (June 14-15).

Acknowledging some 60 million displaced persons around the world, and the

SBC's long history of ministry to refugees and 281 ethnic churches resulting from refugee ministries, the SBC encouraged Baptist churches to "welcome and adopt refugees in their churches and homes."

The resolution called on the government to screen strictly refugees.

The resolution cited some of the same biblical texts as the SBC's 2011 resolution on [immigration](#). But the 2011 resolution was far less welcoming with a heavy note about protecting the borders, the illegality of the undocumented, the need for restitution on the part of the undocumented for entering the country unlawfully, the rule of law, and opposition to amnesty.

One could read the 2016 resolution as warmly welcoming refugees and the 2011 resolution as ministry to lawbreakers.

Given CBF's focus on refugees with the absence of focus on the plight of the undocumented and the SBC's contrasting resolutions, one wonders if Baptists more readily embrace refugees than the undocumented? And if so, why?

Color and ethnicity are surely not explanations for embracing refugees over the undocumented.

Domestic politics surely plays a significant role. There is simply so much heat around the immigration issue. It's a highly polarized subject with an abundance of false narratives and myths - advanced by both Republicans and Democrats. Nonpartisan advocacy groups of both sides are adamant about the core problems and solutions. Both sides readily toss verbal bombs at the other side.

Perhaps the favored status of refugees over the undocumented is because refugees are seen as victims of war, religious persecution or both. The undocumented are seen as those who crossed the border looking for work. The undocumented lack the victim card that refugees have.

Religious persecution and war are profound problems that impoverish and extinguish human life. They also grab headlines with jarring footage and heartbreaking stories.

Economic hardships - the lack of employment opportunities to feed one's children and to fulfill one's divine gifts - create victims as much as persecution and war do. Economics, however, appear to have murkier moral status.

The biblical mandate is clear about how we are to treat the least of those among us, the stranger. Both refugees and the undocumented deserve the welcome and just treatment by Christians.

Let's not prioritize one over the other or ignore one for the other.

✘ [Robert Parham](#) is executive editor of [EthicsDaily.com](#) and executive director of its parent organization, the Baptist Center for Ethics. Follow him on Twitter at [RobertParham1](#) and [friend him](#) on Facebook.

Editor's Note: To explore the plight of the undocumented and what U.S. churches are doing to meet needs, order "[Gospel Without Borders](#)." It's an ecumenical look at constructive engagement.