



MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL of CHURCHES

November 18, 2015

Dear Governor Baker,

We speak with one voice, as Church leaders in Massachusetts. We believe in a Commonwealth where all people can live safely, especially those fleeing war and persecution. We pledge our voices and our churches' active support to resettle Syrian refugees in Massachusetts.

We understand your priority is the safety of Massachusetts residents. Our safety is at greater risk if we let Daesh compromise our values by acting out of fear instead of compassion. We believe the act of shunning the Syrians would strengthen Daesh. Please reconsider your decision to stop welcoming Syrian parents and children into our state. These are innocent, suffering people. **Refugees do not bring terror, they are fleeing from it.**

As Christians we try to live our lives in accordance with Jesus' Great Commandment - to love our neighbors as ourselves. We want safe homes, the freedom to worship, stable governments and opportunities to thrive. Our Syrian neighbors desire the same. Our faith also teaches us to welcome the stranger. Syrians seeking refuge, as well as the Somalians, Bhutanese, Iraqis, Central Americans and others, are neighbors worthy of our welcome and in need of our care. Our nation is founded on this welcome. We must make sure that we do not allow fear to overwhelm us, crowd out our compassion, or fundamentally change our character. We refuse to live as a Commonwealth scared of those unlike us.

Our hope for the people of Massachusetts is to love ALL neighbors, and welcome ALL strangers.

In every generation, Massachusetts leaders have welcomed refugees and those fleeing violence from all corners of the globe: European Jews, and Bosnians, and Sudanese, and Iraqis. In recent history, our churches worked with Governor Romney in preparation to welcome those fleeing the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Eskinder Negash, senior vice president for the US Committee for Refugees and

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Immigrants tells us that “refugees are probably the most vetted people to come to this country.”

We are prepared to welcome and support Syrian refugees. Our churches are in every single city and town of Massachusetts. We believe in a Commonwealth and a nation that lives out of our deepest values, not our fears. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you and strategize for the resettlement of those fleeing violence in Syria.

In peace,

The Rev. Dr. Jim Antal, Minister and President, MA Conference, United Church of Christ

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