July Moderator’s Column

As a community of faith, we are responsible to be aware of and involved in the larger world to which the church and its members are called to bear witness to Christ’s love and justice. That is a way more complicated statement than it seems on the surface. It implies that we have witness to bear not just to individuals but also to systems in society. *The Brief Statement of Faith*, one of our confessions in the Book of Confessions, states it this way:

In a broken and fearful world

the Spirit gives us courage  
 to pray without ceasing,

to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,

to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,

to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,

and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

On July 1, a law goes into effect that severely limits the rights of people in Florida without documentation. It also limits the rights of religious groups and citizens involved in the agriculture, hospitality and construction industry and the medical community to practice their vocations without breaking the law.

The Anti -Racism Committee of our presbytery met in June with two of our state representatives to find out more about this law. These representatives encouraged us to get the word out to you all in our presbytery about what this law provides and its implications for us as citizens. The committee’s resulting statement is available on the presbytery Website through this link: http://www.cfpresbytery.org/. We plan to offer a workshop on the implications of the law for our congregations and members at a yet to be determined date.

We have heard from pastors in some of our congregations which have members without legal documentation about their concerns for their members. I remember well the days now fifteen years ago when members of some of our churches were afraid to go to church for fear they would be picked up and deported on the way to church, and that makes me perhaps unusually sensitive to their concerns. I have further concerns for all of us who may be part of a church mission trip or conference that causes us to cross state lines with a member who does not have documentation because it puts us at risk of being charged with human trafficking.

Some of you may well think that your moderator has this month quit preaching and gone to meddling as they say where I am from. I write this column with the conviction that our faith, while personal is never private and that when we are informed about the unintended consequences of legislation that has implications for us all, we are able to be both better Christians and better citizens of the great state of which we are a part. I encourage all of you to read the statement and share it with members of your congregation. We can all help our members know what is permitted and how to protect themselves and those they serve as we are informed about the implications of the law.