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## **Statement on Citizenship**

The Evangelical Immigration Table Statement of Principles calls for immigration reform that “establishes a path toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents.” We believe a just and fair immigration system should include, for those who want it and qualify, clear steps to citizenship. This call is rooted in our biblically informed commitment to human freedom and dignity.

We recognize that immigrants come to the United States for different reasons. Some want to work, either temporarily or for a number of years, and then return to their home countries. Others are prepared to make a permanent commitment as U.S. citizens. Our immigration system should allow for each of these options.

For the currently undocumented, the first step should be a registration process and background check, and payment of a fine or fulfillment of community service. Those who qualify for provisional status should then be able to earn legal permanent residency over a period of feasible years by working, paying taxes, learning English, and demonstrating their good moral character. Additional visas will be needed to make sure that those already in line are processed first. This will ensure that those applying now do not enjoy an advantage over those who have been trying to comply with immigration laws, while allowing all qualified applicants to earn status within a reasonable period.

Everyone who achieves permanent residence status should be allowed to work toward citizenship if they are willing to embrace all of the responsibilities of citizenship. This typically involves a three- to five-year waiting period, demonstrating good moral character, and meeting specific requirements for English language proficiency and U.S. civics knowledge, with appropriate exemptions for the elderly and for persons with disabilities.

American democracy is anchored by the conviction that all human beings are created in God’s image, and should be treated with dignity and respect. For those who have earned the right to live permanently in the United States, citizenship is a natural next step. Citizenship confers both rights and responsibilities for participation in our national life. There is nothing to be gained by barring lawful permanent residents from becoming citizens.

Our ability to attract and integrate motivated immigrants and their families gives us a competitive edge in the global marketplace. Keeping families together reflects our deeply held values. Having a fair and balanced system that includes a process for earning permanent residence status and eventually citizenship serves our national interest. The naturalization ceremony is always a deeply inspiring display of patriotism. Those who commit to citizenship voluntarily enrich the meaning of citizenship for all of us.