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Advocating for Dreamers: A Wesleyan Approach to U.S. Immigration Reform

Abstract:

This paper argues that Wesley's theology supports radical hospitality toward all U.S. immigrants, regardless of documentation. Specifically, the emphasis John Wesley placed on loving one's neighbor forces us to consider the immigrant's well being alongside our own. Additionally, his understanding of liberty calls for Christians to support human flourishing for all people. Further, Wesley's argument that all humanity is to be considered equal rejects any idea of superiority or supremacy as a justification for withholding hospitality. Finally, in John Wesley's daily spiritual practices, he emphasized care for society's most vulnerable members - who must, in contemporary times, include the immigrant. In John Wesley's writing and practice he demonstrated a Christian commitment to public engagement with complex structural realities; his comprehensive perspective of social holiness necessitates a consideration for the justice of the most vulnerable members of our society: the children of undocumented immigrants. This paper was originally presented at a Social Holiness Colloquium held from April 26-27, 2018 at Asbury Theological Seminary.

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Introduction

Within the political sphere of the United States today there is significant tension related to immigration policies, especially around the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program and the vulnerable state of its intended recipients. Many Christian scholars and churches have offered a response to this situation, using arguments from scripture and Christian tradition to extend hospitality to the stranger and to work for justice on behalf of this marginalized group. These arguments are an important contribution to the conversation; however, as a United Methodist with Wesleyan roots, I believe a distinctively Wesleyan approach to the current political situation around immigration would benefit Christians who share this theological heritage as they seek to live out their Wesleyan faith in the public sphere today.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a theological response rooted in Wesleyan thought to the political situation of DACA-recipients and undocumented immigrants who arrived as children, commonly referred to as Dreamers.¹ First, I will seek to outline the current political and socio-cultural situation. Then, I will provide a review of current theological responses to immigration reform. Next, I will construct the theological basis for a Wesleyan response to the situation. Finally, I will present a practical approach grounded in Wesleyan theology for the church to engage this issue. I will argue that a Wesleyan theological approach to DACA-recipients in the United States involves a response of Christian hospitality and public advocacy for immigration reform that is grounded in perfect love.

Socio-cultural Situation

In order to offer an effective theological response, it is important to provide an orientation to the political and social situation of the DACA program within the context of undocumented immigration in the United States. This section will begin by painting broad strokes of global migration and the situation of immigration in the United States, which will set the scene for an explanation of the history and impact of DACA and will conclude with an overview of the current political situation in the months since the program's initial rescinding.

Migration in the twenty-first century is a global phenomenon influencing nations worldwide, as increasing numbers of people are becoming displaced and living outside of their places of origin. Though migration has been a common theme throughout history, it has become

prominent in this century, with an estimated 240 million international migrants in the world today (Martinez 2017:73). Many factors influence the international movement of people, including: conflict, war, violence, natural disasters, climate change, and desires for social and economic advancement through work and education (Tira 2016: 22). Migrants may be refugees or asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking, or immigrants with varying degrees of documentation or legal status.

The United States is one of the largest receiving nations of migrants. It receives more migrants from the global South than anyone else, primarily from Central America (including Mexico). More than fifty percent of Central American immigrants in the United States are undocumented (Maruskin 2012). The number of undocumented immigrants in the United States is estimated at 11 to 12 million (Kosnac 2014: 2). The issue of the unlawful presence of immigrants has recently increased in prominence since President Donald Trump took office, due to his vocal anti-immigration, America first platform; though, it has been a source of political tension for decades.

Despite political division on the topic of immigration and the appropriate response to undocumented persons residing in the United States, a significant majority of U.S. citizens believes there should be a pathway made available to undocumented immigrants who entered the United States as minors, by no volition of their own. According to Pew Research, 72% of Americans believe that irregular immigrants who came as children should be allowed to stay. It is out of this conviction that the DACA program was birthed. For nearly two decades, bipartisan legislators have been working to pass legislation that would create a pathway to citizenship for childhood arrivals. The legislation with the greatest potential to make a change was the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. Introduced in 2001, the DREAM Act was to provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented persons who arrived as minors and obtained a college education or entered the military (Kosnac 2014: 3). Since the DREAM Act failed to be passed for over a decade, in 2012 the Obama administration issued a temporary reprieve to this population in the form of the DACA program (Kosnac 2014: xi).

The DACA program was established in 2012 to offer a temporary quasi-legal status to undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as minors. While there is a significant process involved in obtaining DACA, its recipients are awarded lawful presence for a two-year period,

which is renewable, and they are given a social security number and work authorization (Armenta 2017: 39). In order to be eligible for DACA, an undocumented immigrant must have arrived in the United States before the age of 16, have been residing in country for 5 consecutive years, and have completed or be in the process of obtaining a high school education or GED-equivalent. It is estimated that nearly two million undocumented persons meet these requirements, yet only 800,000 have received DACA (Kosnac 2014: 5). There are a number of barriers for the immigrant community in applying for this benefit: first, it reveals the person to the government, placing them at risk, if DACA were ever to be repealed; second, it requires significant documentation to prove consecutive residency for five years, as a minor; finally, the application and legal fees are substantial (Gonzales 2014: 6). So, many eligible persons do not receive DACA; to say nothing of the many undocumented childhood arrivals who do not fit within the strict eligibility guidelines.

Those who do receive DACA still have a number of limitations to face in American society. DACA does not provide a pathway to citizenship; so, its recipients, while protected from deportation for a temporary period, do not have full rights. They are unable to participate fully in public life; for example, they cannot vote and are ineligible to serve in many governmental positions. Further, though they pay into social security, they will not benefit from it. Also, they are not eligible to receive federal funding for higher education, though DACA does open up other funding sources to them. Another important limitation is the impact that the situations of their undocumented family members and close community connections have on their personal lives. While DACA-recipients are given a temporary reprieve, issues of deportation continue to impact them as they fear for their relatives' safety and well-being.

Despite the limitations of DACA, the benefits it provides to the young adults who receive it empower them to move more freely in mainstream society, by giving them the ability to attend college, receive access to some financial support, and be legally employed. The benefits of DACA-recipients have positively impacted the overall society, as well. The majority of DACA-recipients have been able to receive new employment as a result of DACA and nearly half of them have increased their income. This has positively impacted the United States' economy (Kosnac 2014: 3). While DACA has provided benefits both to its recipients and to the overall society, it has been only a partial solution.

The temporary reprieve of the DACA program has been truncated by the Trump administration's decision to rescind the program. President Trump announced DACA's repeal on September 5, 2017 in order to encourage Congress to find a legislative solution to the situation of undocumented childhood arrivals (Hoffman 2017: 1). However, in the midst of the Congress' failure to find a solution to DACA over the course of the following six months, the Federal Courts intervened on behalf of those already holding DACA-status, granting them the right to continued application renewal.² While the court's intervention has provided a stop gap for current recipients, the rescinding of the program has placed those whose renewal applications are pending in a tenuous, fearful situation; further it has made it impossible for other undocumented childhood arrivals to take advantage of the DACA program. Still as yet, the government has not offered an alternative solution to the plight of this vulnerable community.

Dreamers, or undocumented childhood arrivals, are among the most vulnerable members of United States society. DACA, though a partial benefit for those who hold it, does not grant legal status and can be terminated at any time, at which point the DACA-recipient is at risk of deportation. For young adults who have lived in the United States since childhood, came here by no choice of their own, and have lived as contributing members of a society they call their own even though it does not accept them as full members, deportation is life-threatening. This vulnerable population is in need of comprehensive immigration reform in order for them to flourish and continue to be a benefit to American society.

Approaching a Wesleyan Theology of Immigration

In response to the situation of immigrants in the United States, many theologians have offered biblical and theological arguments in support of welcoming the stranger and seeking immigration reform. However, there are not arguments being made from distinctly Wesleyan perspectives. The following section will review prominent voices responding theologically to issues of immigration before constructing a Wesleyan immigration theology built upon the foundation of John Wesley's theological commitments and his public example of faith.

M. Daniel Carroll R. is a contemporary theologian who has done extensive scholarly work in the biblical theology of immigration. He engages the entire biblical narrative in order to support a Christian position

of charity and openness toward immigrants. Carroll cites Old Testament law, the teachings of Jesus, and the theological principles of God's love and the image of God in humanity, in order to construct his argument. For Carroll a properly biblical response begins with the Christian reception of immigrants and extends to a legislative welcome, as well.

In his book *Christians at the Border*, Carroll is responding to Christians who use particular biblical references to support their anti-immigrant stance. He notes that often people holding this position cite Romans 13, focusing on the issue of immigrants' legal standing in relationship to the God-ordained authorities of a nation. Carroll believes that this approach is in error, as an appropriate theological response to immigration "should arise from a set of beliefs and commitments" which are found not in proof texting individual verses of the Bible, but in the comprehensive narrative of the scriptures (Carroll 2013: 122).

For Carroll the revelation of Scriptures toward immigrants compels Christians to respond in love and welcome. Beginning with the Old Testament, he highlights that God's law for Israel included the appropriate response toward sojourners or immigrants, which was to meet their needs. The Old Testament law considers immigrants as vulnerable and disadvantaged people in need of justice. Carroll continues his argument, focusing on Jesus' teachings in the New Testament. He relates the situation of immigrants to the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which Jesus teaches that we are to love our neighbors, and that our neighbors are distinctly "other" from us. Overall Carroll argues that the narrative of scripture supports compassionate laws toward vulnerable persons and love extended to the outsider in the practice of hospitality.

Theologian Ched Myers follows in the vein of Carroll as he also uses arguments from the Bible to support a welcoming approach and a reform of policy toward immigrants. Myers' use of scripture differs from Carroll's however, in that he focuses on themes of removing division, deconstructing segregation, celebrating diversity, and living into God's intent for the human community. Myers sees God's desire for humanity as being a community of discipleship and communion, which cannot happen when there is disenfranchisement and exclusion, which is the reality of the immigrant population today (Myers 2012: 105). In order for the church to live into God's vision, it is necessary that they address the social and political systems that cause the marginalization of immigrants.

In one chapter of his book *Our God is Undocumented*, Myers reflects on Isaiah and Luke's perspectives of God's intent for the human community. From Myers' point of view, Isaiah makes arguments for ethical boundaries rather than enforcing divisions based on people's status. So, individuals who were historically outsiders in the cultic life of Israel have access to the community by virtue of their ethics rather than their place in society. Myers believes this perspective is reiterated by Jesus in Luke who sides with outsiders and seeks to challenge the exclusionary practices of the elite (2012: 103). Jesus' solidarity with the marginalized is again highlighted by Myers in his reflections on Mark in which Jesus models a ministry of inclusion and reconciliation, calling out the inequality and injustice of contemporary religious practices. Myers argues that Jesus' treatment toward the "others" of his day should inform the church's practices of solidarity toward immigrants who are our contemporary "others."

Carroll and Myers are two contemporary voices in Christian theology that argue that the church should be receptive toward and work for justice on behalf of the marginalized community of immigrants in our society today. They and many other theologians use the narrative of scripture and the theological values that are displayed in it to make their case. The arguments they make from scripture could be received by many Christian traditions, but are not distinctively associated with a particular theological expression. In what follows, I propose to offer a more targeted theological response to the situation of undocumented immigrants, which is not merely "Christian" or "scriptural," but is grounded in Wesleyan commitments.

While Wesley did not address issues of migration directly, his foundational theological commitments paired with his personal and public engagement on issues relating to vulnerable persons, allow us to construct a distinctively Wesleyan approach to contemporary U.S. immigration reform, specifically in our reception of and policy toward undocumented childhood arrivals. Wesley, like the aforementioned contemporary theologians, would place a high value on scripture and what it has to say in response to this issue, but a properly Wesleyan response, while beginning with scripture, would extend beyond it. This high view of scripture, along with a commitment to social holiness, and a perspective of sanctification as perfect love, are three theological commitments that provide underpinnings to my argument and are foundational for Wesleyan theology.

For Wesley, the witness of scripture was central to his theology. Wesleyan theology proclaims that scripture contains all that is necessary

for salvation and that the Bible in its entire substance provides the basis for the Christian faith. For Wesley, reading and meditating upon scripture was a daily task and an important means of grace through which God's Spirit worked in the life of the Christian. So, in constructing a Wesleyan approach to immigration reform, scripture must provide the foundation. We have seen this employed in the arguments by contemporary theologians; however, Wesley's use of scripture is focused more on its transformational impact. The transformative nature of scripture plays an important role in the holiness and sanctification in the life of individual believers and the Christian community.

Holiness is a central theme in Wesleyan theology, vital both to individuals and to community as we are being transformed to be more Christlike in our life of faith. Wesley is famously quoted on the importance of social holiness in the Christian community, "The gospel of Christ knows of...no holiness but social holiness," (Wesley 1739: viii). For Wesley this means that the Christian faith is not practiced individually but must be lived out in community. The impact of the gospel is such that Christians are called to live holy lives, not only based upon the individual's piety, but that of the community. The Christian faith, for Wesley, is necessarily public and the Christian community should present a public witness of faith as together they live out the values they find in scripture.

What Wesley expects of the Christian community is also expected of the individual Christian: living a life of holiness and becoming more like Jesus Christ. This is the process of sanctification, of moving onto perfection. Continuing from Wesley's statement on social holiness, he goes on to say, "Faith working by love is the ... height of Christian perfection. This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God, love his brother also; and that we manifest our love by doing good unto all men, especially to them that are of the household of faith," (Wesley 1739:viii-ix). Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection, then, was not that the Christian would be without any fault or error, but rather it is based upon the greatest commandment in scripture: to love. So, for Wesley, the Christian who is made perfect in love must "love every [hu]man as [their] own soul, as Christ loved [them]," (Wesley 1958: 413). Wesley's perspective of Christian perfection is grounded in a deep commitment to scripture and has important implications for the Christian community's public witness, as Christian love is lived out.

Wesley's theological commitments to scripture, social holiness, and the sanctifying process of being made perfect in love influenced the ways in which he lived out his faith and the messages he preached. Wesley's theology could be observed in his way of life. The sermons he preached and the publications he authored were reflective of his personal faith commitments, as he sought to live a life of Christian perfection in his relationship with God and with other Christians in society. Three distinctives of Wesley's approach, which rise out of his theological commitments, include his emphasis on face-to-face relationships, his commitment to working with the vulnerable, and his engagement of the political sphere. From Wesley's example and writing on these areas we will construct our Wesleyan approach to immigration reform.

Wesley's theological commitments led him to be intentional in his relationships, placing high value on fostering personal connections in his ministry of sharing the gospel. For Wesley, the transformative power of the gospel was most effectively shared in relating with people face-to-face. The witness of scripture also informed Wesley of precisely the type of people Christians were to be intentional about relating to: the most vulnerable members of society. Just as Wesley read and meditated upon scripture in his daily life, he also spent time relating to vulnerable persons in face-to-face relationships, which he saw as another means of grace and an important part of his transformative journey to perfect love.

In his sermon "On Visiting the Sick" he speaks of fostering relationships with society's most vulnerable, marginalized members as a universal Christian task and an important means of grace. Wesley refers to Matthew 25 in which Jesus teaches about the final judgment. The standard by which humanity is to be judged, according to scripture, is based upon behavior toward the "least of these," which include: the hungry, the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the prisoner, and the stranger (Matthew 25:34ff). For the purposes of Wesley's sermon he focuses on only the sick, as he finds them to be accessible for all and yet ignored by most. However, Wesley is not suggesting that these other categories of vulnerable persons be ignored; in fact, Wesley would argue that it is the universal duty of Christians to respond as Christ to all vulnerable persons, regardless of the category of their marginalization. As we established in our review of theological arguments in response to the issue of immigration, the biblical references to "stranger" fit our contemporary understanding of migrants and immigrants.

So, while Wesley focuses on the sick in his sermon, it would be appropriate to apply the teachings from this sermon to our treatment of and interaction with immigrants, as with the other vulnerable persons mentioned by Jesus in this scripture text.

Wesley details in his sermon what visiting the sick implies, how it is to be done, and who should visit them. He highlights the importance of engaging with the sick face-to-face as a means of grace. For Wesley this interaction is transformational for those who open their hearts to the vulnerable. He points out that: "One great reason why the rich, in general, have so little sympathy for the poor, is, because they so seldom visit them," (Wesley 1958: 119). By this he implies that in spending time with vulnerable or marginalized groups in society, we are able to be made aware of their circumstances and suffering in a tangible way, our hearts are opened to them, and compassion follows. It is very easy to ignore the plight of people who suffer when we are not engaged in personal face-to-face interactions with them on a regular basis. Wesley emphasizes that the piety of the vulnerable does not weigh in on the responsibility of Christians to respond to their duty to offer relationship: "whether they are good or bad, whether they fear God or not," (whether they have legal status or not) the message of Christ is that we are to care for them in their circumstance of need, (1958: 118). Wesley believes that applying this scripture to our lives is essential for all Christians who desire to enter into Christ's kingdom, because by offering relationship to the vulnerable, we invite Christ into our lives.

Just as John Wesley's theological commitments drove him to engage in personal relationships with the vulnerable, they also compelled him to engage the public through advocacy on behalf of marginalized and vulnerable peoples. In 1774, John Wesley published *Thoughts upon Slavery*, a booklet calling upon political decision-makers to bring an end to institutional slavery in Great Britain. This work of advocacy serves as an example for Wesleyan political engagement today on behalf of vulnerable peoples who are subject to unmerciful and unjust political systems, such as DACA-recipients and other undocumented childhood arrivals. While the circumstances of the enslaved Africans in eighteenth century England differ greatly from those of undocumented childhood arrivals in the United States today, Wesley's convictions for universal values of justice and mercy toward a vulnerable people group in society can be extended beyond the context to which he wrote.

John Wesley begins his response to slavery in Great Britain by appealing to the shared humanity between slaves and members of British society. He goes into great detail overviewing the atrocities being committed toward the enslaved population: removal from their country, separation from family and friends, and reduction to being treated as less than human. Then he asks his readers whether this was the intention of the Creator for humanity. In reading Wesley's account we can draw some analogies between contemporary immigrants who have been displaced due to economic, natural, and political forces and those who were enslaved during Wesley's time: cultural dislocation, mistreatment, abuse, poor labor conditions, and separation from families. Wesley's response to the atrocities of his day was to engage the decision-makers by advocating on behalf of enslaved persons, appealing to their sacred worth as fellow bearers of God's image, and arguing for them to be treated with mercy and justice.

As he continues in his appeal for justice and mercy, Wesley takes the time to consider the popular arguments of his day in maintaining and supporting the institution of slavery. He notes that many appeal to the law's authorization for slavery to defend their position. Wesley is dissatisfied with this reasoning, declaring that human law does not have the power to change evil into good. He remarks that regardless of the legal system that is in place, injustice and cruelty are indefensible and the treatment of the enslaved population is irreconcilable with the Christian values of mercy and justice.

Wesley concludes his pamphlet reminding his readers of the virtue of love, which is the motivating factor in his authoring this publication. It is out of love for the vulnerable peoples being oppressed as well as love for their oppressors that Wesley writes. It is the love of God that compels Wesley's message of advocating for justice and mercy on behalf of the vulnerable. And because of his love for the oppressors, he reminds his readers of the ways of God's justice and mercy: "[God] shall have judgment without mercy [toward those] that showed no mercy," (Wesley 1958: 77). He calls his readers to act with a heart of compassion, to understand the pain they are causing their fellow humans, and to make a change for liberty. Just as Wesley's love for God and humanity compel him to speak on behalf of the vulnerable, he calls others to extend mercy and act for justice, so that society may be transformed.

A Wesleyan Response to DACA-Recipients

We have already begun to construct a Wesleyan response to the current situation of immigration in the United States as we have explored the ways in which Wesley's theological commitments were displayed in his writings and daily life. In light of Wesley's commitment to face-to-face relationships, working with vulnerable persons, and engaging the public to advocate for justice we now must consider what this means for our response to the vulnerable members of our society today, namely DACA-recipients who have been placed at risk with the program's repeal and other Dreamers. A Wesleyan response to the repeal of DACA and those affected by it should be characterized by hospitality and public engagement.

Wesley's commitment to face-to-face relationships should inspire Christians and churches of a Wesleyan heritage to extend hospitality to Dreamers. The value Wesley places on face-to-face relationships is demonstrated in his sermon "On Visiting the Sick" which we addressed earlier. In this sermon he refers to Matthew 25 to provide groundwork for his argument. Although Wesley focuses on only one of the categories of persons listed in this text, he makes it clear that the duty of Christians is not limited to visiting the sick. We also find within this text an expectation from Jesus to welcome the stranger, and from here we can establish our response to offer hospitality to those affected by DACA's repeal.

Hospitality is an ancient Christian tradition that can be observed in John Wesley's life as well as the life of the church since its earliest days. As Wesley was compelled to regularly visit the sick, the poor, and prisoners in his own ministry, so Christians throughout history have engaged in these acts of hospitality towards persons in need in society, especially toward the stranger. While the biblical understanding of stranger can be understood in contemporary times to refer to immigrants, refugees, and our own Dreamers, it is important to recognize the word at face value as well. A stranger is someone you do not know. However, when extending hospitality and welcome, you come to know the stranger, and here we see the value of face-to-face relationships, where the stranger can become part of the community.

In order for Dreamers to truly become a part of the community, hospitality expressed through face-to-face relationships is a necessary first step. In doing so, we welcome the transformative power of Jesus Christ into the relationship and into our community, for whenever we welcome the stranger, we welcome Christ. The welcome implied by hospitality is

to provide for basic needs, offer protection, and foster a connection with the community (Pohl 1999: 17). When hospitality is offered to its fullest potential, by connecting the stranger with the community, their status as a stranger is removed, they are no longer the “DACA-recipient,” the “Dreamer,” the “undocumented immigrant,” but they become members, receiving the rights and privileges of the community (Yong 2008: 110). Offering hospitality extends the community’s boundaries, as personal relationships transform the stranger into a member.

As we consider this call to hospitality, issues of boundaries and the reality of limitations must be addressed. While there are some who make theological arguments for open borders, there are practical concerns that must be considered before going so far. While Wesley recognized the universal duty of all Christians to follow Christ’s call to provide for many categories of vulnerable persons, he chose to emphasize visiting the sick, because there is the reality of a limited capacity for individuals to engage in face-to-face relationships with all people. There is also a limitation upon the capacity of nations, and so boundaries are put in place. Personal, communal, and national boundaries exist for many good reasons, such as security and identity (Pohl 2006: 97). However, that does not give license for Christians to exclude those in need or fail to perform their duty to offer welcome. It simply implies that intentionality is necessary as we extend hospitality.

One way to be intentional in our offering of hospitality toward the stranger is to focus specifically on Dreamers, especially as we consider the role of the nation in offering welcome, as well. The majority perspective toward Dreamers in the United States is one of receptivity, which means that issues of security and national identity are not of major concern in their reception. And while Christians should be hospitable toward all immigrants, regardless of their circumstances, if we want to see transformation in society, we must be intentional in our witness. Ultimately, though, Christians offering hospitality is not a sufficient or comprehensive response to the situation of undocumented immigrants in the United States, whether DACA-recipients or not, so if we want to see the needs of this vulnerable people group fully met, we must begin where we can make a difference. This intentional approach of hospitality must also recognize the vulnerable social location of those to whom we offer welcome.

Wesley’s example of working with the vulnerable compels Christians today to intentionally interact with the marginalized Dreamers in

our society and offer them hospitality as expressed in Christ's perfect love. The Wesleyan commitment to being sanctified is to be made perfect in our love toward God and humankind. As we turn to scripture to understand what Christ's expectations of our love are, we see a particular emphasis on offering love and care to our most vulnerable neighbors. The hospitality that Christ expects us to offer is one that intentionally receives the oppressed and marginalized (Yong 2008: 103). And as we have established, Dreamers are one of these vulnerable groups. Additionally, Wesley calls us to offer this community particular love in his statement on social holiness and perfect love, in which he emphasizes the special priority of love toward those who are "members of the household of faith," (Wesley 1739). Of note, the majority of immigrants coming to the United States are Christians and therefore, members with us of the household of faith.

Dreamers are members of our community and society who don't fully belong and therefore lack some of the basic support necessary for human flourishing. Without access to the rights offered to full members of society, they do not have the ability to sustain themselves, to gain access to important resources, or to thrive. With the DACA program, some of these obstacles were removed from their path and they were able to access educational and financial resources previously withheld from them; however, with DACA's repeal they return to their vulnerable status and are at risk of deportation and therefore losing what little support and community that is left to them.

Our Christian duty and our Wesleyan heritage obligates us to extend welcome and support to these vulnerable persons who are dependent upon us for their livelihoods. As we study scripture, we learn that the qualities of God's love are expressed through the people of faith in tangible demonstrations of care toward society's vulnerable members: the widows, the orphans, the poor, and the immigrants. If we are to live into Christ's call of perfect love, we must offer care through personal, face-to-face relationships to provide them access to and membership within the Christian community, if not also the broader society. Christ's love also must extend beyond personal relationships and beyond the boundaries of the Christian community to address the injustices of society.

Wesley models this in his engagement with the public on behalf of the oppressed and his example calls the church today to advocate for Dreamers. Hospitality on its own can make a difference in the life of individual Dreamers, but if the political system remains as it is, their

vulnerable situation is perpetuated. As United States' society increasingly focuses on maintaining strong boundaries for reasons of security and identity, the voices of the vulnerable are overpowered (Pohl 2006: 82). The priority of providing safety and community to Dreamers has lessened substantially and will continue to do so unless influential voices begin to reshape the policies in favor of the vulnerable. This is the responsibility of the Christian, whose commitment to holiness within their personal life and the life of Christian community should also extend to the broader society out of a desire to see God's justice realized and Christ's kingdom of perfect love lived out.

Wesley used public engagement to advocate on behalf of slaves and Wesleyan Christians today should follow his lead of advocacy on behalf of Dreamers. Wesley was intentional in using his position of influence to speak to the public and to political decision-makers in order to bring about a just and merciful society (Field 2015: 2). Out of his love for God and for humanity, especially its vulnerable members, he addressed the unjust political systems of his day. By engaging the public sphere, Wesley is prophetic, as he advocates for a vision that, if realized, would create a more just society, in line with the values of Christ's kingdom.

As Wesleyan Christians advocate for Dreamers today, they, too, must speak prophetically out of a desire to see the transformational impact of God's vision of justice and mercy. Advocacy is an important aspect of Christian public engagement which involves using the positions, power, and privileges that are held by the church and its members in order to speak and act on behalf of society's vulnerable members whose voices are overpowered, excluded, or ignored. It is also essential that Christians who are engaged in public advocacy to stand in solidarity with those for whom they speak. For this reason, our Wesleyan foundation of face-to-face relationships is so important. When Christians stand in solidarity with vulnerable peoples they also create platforms for their silenced voices to be heard. Creating space for the voices of the vulnerable is a significant step toward society's transformation.

There exist a number of practical concerns that create barriers to engaging Dreamers in this Wesleyan approach. For Christians who understand the socio-cultural reality, who agree that Dreamers are in a vulnerable situation, and who believe it is their duty to respond in love to offer hospitality and advocacy, there still can be difficulties in actually putting this into practice. Perhaps this is why John Wesley focused on

visiting the sick when he taught about the universal duty of Christians to care for the vulnerable, as sick persons are an identifiable and accessible category to care for. Questions of where and how to find Dreamers in order to welcome them, or what to do in advocating can keep Christians from acting at all. While applying a Wesleyan approach to DACA-recipients does come with its challenges, there are many practical responses Christians and Christian communities can undertake.

First, to engage in intentional face-to-face relationships and offer hospitality, Christians can open up their churches and their gathering places to immigrant communities. By publicly promoting their church as welcoming to immigrants, they send a message that their community is a safe place. Further, Christians should cultivate a hospitable theology amongst their community, so that when Dreamers do come, they feel welcomed. Finally, Christians can make the effort to go to where the Dreamers are. Due to the current political situation, many Dreamers are engaged in political protests, rallies, public panels, and gatherings, to stand up for their rights and express their desire to be included as full members in the broader society. So, for Christians who do not already have relationships with Dreamers or know them personally, they can seek them out at an event and begin to offer support.

In addition to forming relationships that offer hospitality, Christians have a responsibility to engage the public sphere on behalf of the Dreamers. This can be approached in much the same way as offering hospitality. When a church makes a public statement of welcome and hospitality toward Dreamers, they express to the broader society their position on the subject. From this, churches can also allow their space to be utilized by Dreamers and those advocating for them. Churches may decide to offer their buildings as a sanctuary, if individual Dreamers are under threat of deportation since their status of lawful presence has been revoked. Christians can also engage the political process through writing letters or making phone calls to their political representatives. Finally, Christians can leave their church buildings and go and stand in solidarity with Dreamers as they make public demonstrations for their rights.

Conclusion

The repeal of the DACA program has placed the already vulnerable Dreamers at further risk, necessitating a response from people of faith. Based on the commitments of Wesleyan theology, I have constructed an

approach to this socio-cultural situation that calls Christians of a Wesleyan heritage to respond in love by extending hospitality to and engaging in public advocacy on behalf of Dreamers. Practically applying this approach is only a partial response to the larger issues of U.S. immigration policy and the factors causing global migration and the displacement of people worldwide. By focusing on Dreamers, my case is made more palatable and practical, as society is more receptive toward Dreamers than to the broader immigrant community and there is a limited scope of the expansion of United States' boundaries to include the immigrant population. However, Dreamers are members of families and support networks who have even more limited options in relationship to legal status. For Dreamers the reception of their immigrant parents, siblings, and neighbors impacts their own ability to thrive in society, as well. It is my hope that extending hospitality to and seeking the societal transformation on behalf of Dreamers is only the beginning of a comprehensive immigration reform that is imbued with values of justice and mercy. I believe that the theological heritage of Wesley continues to offer foundations for Christians today to respond to the injustices in society and to engage the public sphere as they hope for a world transformed by Christ's perfect love.

End Notes

¹ The term "Dreamers" originated with the DREAM Act, which failed to pass the legislative process but birthed the DACA-program. This term is commonly used to refer to the population of undocumented childhood arrivals and is inclusive of those persons who are or have been DACA-recipients and those eligible for DACA who may have been rejected from the program or not applied.

² For more information on this visit: <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-response-january-2018-preliminary-injunction>.

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