

## Act on solidarity with immigrants approved with a unanimous vote by the Synod 2009 of the Waldensian Church (Union of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches)

The Synod of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches

- guided by the Word of God «Seek the welfare of the city» (Jeremiah 29 v7);
- recalling the principles upon which our Republic and our common democratic life are founded, according to which all obstacles which discriminate on the basis of «race, faith and personal condition» ought to be removed;
- remembering the experience of emigration – including illegal emigration – which in the past involved many Italians, including many members of our own churches, who then went on to become full citizens of the nations to which they had gone;
- convinced that the promotion of full integration and the obtaining of citizenship on the part of immigrants who contribute to the wellbeing of Italy, is in the best interests of our Republic and not a threat to be blocked;

expresses its indignation

- at the consequences which the law of July 15, 2009 (law 94/2009) has, not only for immigrants but also for Italian citizens, for the quality of our democracy and for our legal rights;
- at the sentiments of mistrust which are fed by such laws: both amongst immigrants, who find themselves in a situation of psychological subjection, whether or not they are living here legally; and amongst Italians, irresponsibly led to believe that, on the one hand, clandestine immigration is the principal cause of social disorder, and, on the other, that this law will bring greater security to our country, when, in reality, it will contribute to an increase in clandestine activity, favouring the exploitation of foreigners and their «disappearance» into total invisibility, exposing them to the risk of becoming prey to organised crime.

In particular, Synod believes that a law such as 94/2009, which is in open conflict with the fundamental principles of our legal system, is unacceptable, because:

- it charges a person with being an illegal foreigner, even when this condition is caused by bureaucratic sluggishness and has nothing to do with a person's actual behaviour, which might justifiably render him/her liable under our laws;
- it raises unfair obstacles to family life and marriage amongst immigrants when our legal system recognises family and marriage to be of particular social value;
- it limits the access of immigrants to medical care, when our legal system recognises that all have the right to health care;
- it limits access to education for immigrant children.

The Waldensian and Methodist churches feel themselves to be directly affected by law 94/2009, both insofar as they are ecclesial organisms and insofar as they have diaconal operations. Pastors and individual believers, members of our churches with institutional responsibilities, will be forced into heartrending choices between, on the one hand, the obligations of conscience and the need for a coherent faith, and, on the other, respect for the law. The same applies to individual believers who are immigrants, especially those who are illegally present in our country.

Synod:

also noting the concerned observations expressed by the President of the Republic when he signed this law, hopes for an immediate commitment on the part of Italian citizens to oppose the discriminating elements of this law, and to work for a revision of the laws governing immigration, and invites the churches to promote this commitment;

commits the churches to combatting the culture of xenophobia with values of the Italian constitution, with the safeguarding of human rights and with a biblically based witness concerning the welcoming of foreigners, and against unfair treatment of the weak;

encourages the work of the Service for Refugees and Migrants of the Italian Protestant Federation and invites everyone to evaluate the contribution to integration and the positive meeting of cultures constituted by the project «being the church together»;

invites the church's Executive (Tavola valdese) to protest to the public authorities whenever the restrictions on immigration limit the liberty and autonomy of the life of the churches.