

Alabama immigration law called nation's 'meanest'

by [Greg Garrison](#) in the [July 12, 2011](#) issue

A new Alabama law that makes it a crime to offer rides to undocumented immigrants is the "meanest" immigration law in the country, according to a United Methodist bishop and respected theologian.

Bishop

William Willimon of the North Alabama Conference called the bill, which was recently signed into law by Gov. Robert Bentley, an embarrassment and motivated by "intimidation and meanness."

Willimon and the state's other United Methodist bishop, Paul Leeland, wrote an open letter to Bentley and lawmakers who pushed the law. "There's a lot of frustration out there, disappointment, embarrassment," Willimon said. "We will come together and pray."

The law includes a provision that makes it illegal to knowingly hire or give a ride to an illegal immigrant. A church volunteer who gives someone a ride to the doctor could be prosecuted, Willimon noted.

"One of the most nefarious aspects of this law is it appears to criminalize Alabamians in the act of being helpful and compassionate," he said, calling the claim that an immigration crackdown will create jobs "particularly repugnant."

Willimon said relief efforts following devastating tornadoes across the state have been hampered, with Spanish-speaking residents "reluctant to receive aid" out of fear of deportation.

"One thing our church is hoping to show our Spanish-speaking friends is that this law is not in our spirit," Willimon said. "We want the world to know that this does not represent the best of Alabama." —RNS