



# Becoming the Church Together

## Immigration, the Bible, and Our New Neighbors



A Biblically Based Curriculum by the North Carolina Council of Churches



Photo courtesy of Uniting NC

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**Get More Free Resources on Immigration:**



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World Communion Sunday  
U.S.-Mexico Border

Photo: Bryan Langdoc

# Introduction

Together we will embark on a course to study the Bible and see how it addresses the issue of modern day immigration. Our goal will be to foster an open, honest, loving, and biblically focused conversation about this important – and controversial – topic. Each lesson focuses on Scripture, while incorporating prayer, activities, videos, and group discussion to help everyone investigate how faith in Christ affects views on immigration. Even as we study issues related to United States law and policy, our first responsibility will always be to examine God’s witness and imagine appropriate responses for our churches as we strive to be disciples of Jesus Christ together.

As a loving family, we should make our best efforts to be open and honest with one another. We invite you to be thoughtful and share your thoughts with your brothers and sisters in Christ, while also listening intently to others. Each of us should assume that we have something to learn from others. Finally, since most of the lessons focus on having conversation, please help create a “safe” space, where everyone feels welcome and loved whether they agree or disagree.

As we begin reading scripture and applying the truth to how we treat our new neighbors, we can have faith that God will be present with us and guiding us towards loving God and loving our fellow human beings in deeper ways.

## Getting Started

There is a Facilitator’s Guide on page 20 with more information about leading these discussions. Each participant will need a booklet. In addition to this booklet, each group will need a DVD, Character Cards and the Immigration Board Game (these materials are all shipped together). If you need to order additional materials or if you have any questions, please visit this curriculum online:

[www.nccouncilofchurches.org/immigration-curriculum](http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org/immigration-curriculum).

## Language About Immigrants

Scripture teaches us that all people are made in the image of God. Like everyone else, immigrants are children of God, whom God loves enough to send Christ. They deserve the dignity and respect that we offer even our closest friends, because Jesus loves us in the same exact way Jesus loves the immigrant in our midst.

In the public sphere there are numerous terms used to describe immigrants, but it is important to think about the negative connotation that some of these terms carry. The terms “illegal” and “illegal immigrant” automatically criminalize the person, instead of the action they are purported to have committed. Shortening the term in this way also stereotypes undocumented people who are in the United States as being unruly or violent.

It is also unhelpful to use the terms “alien” and “illegal alien,” which describe undocumented immigrants as inhuman outsiders who come to the U.S. with questionable motivations. If we use such terminology, we automatically reject our neighbors before we read scripture, pray and discuss with each other. We may

not be open to learning something from the Spirit. When we use the terms “undocumented immigrants” or “unauthorized immigrants” to refer to the roughly 11 million people who are in the U.S. without documents attesting that they are authorized to be here, our language reflects respect and love for all people, and we hope neutral language will enable us to hear God speak through Scripture.

Please note that in many translations of the Bible, the words “alien” or “stranger” are used to refer to immigrants and foreigners. (These Hebrew and Greek terms do not carry negative implications.) Full text of all Scripture passages used in this study can be found starting on page 15.

## About the NC Council of Churches

Since its inception more than 75 years ago, the North Carolina Council of Churches has been working to put Christian values into practice in the public sphere. One of the founding issues for the Council in 1935 was opposition to segregation and support for integration; the Council has long supported vulnerable and excluded people. Today, the Council’s eighteen member denominations have more than 6,200 congregations with about 1.5 million congregants in North Carolina.

The Council worked for labor and housing protection for migrant farmworkers when many of them were African Americans traveling up and down the East Coast. Our commitment to farmworkers has continued even as their demographics have changed to a primarily immigrant Latino population. This commitment has grown to include the broader issues of immigration policy - a position that remains consistent with our founding principles.

After prayerful deliberation, the Council issued a public statement in 2002 welcoming our Latino neighbors and calling on policymakers to increase Latinos’ access to higher education, healthcare and housing, and to provide drivers’ licenses without regard for immigration status. In 2006, the Council passed a statement in support of comprehensive immigration reform, saying that “Religious communities must look to our Scripture and faith traditions which call us to welcome the stranger, promote hospitality, and seek justice.” The Council recognizes the complexity of these issues and respects the many views held by congregants of all denominations.

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# Lesson One: The Life of Christ

## Opening Prayer

Almighty God, you gave yourself for us, your creation. The blood and body of Christ were shed and broken for all peoples in all times, because your love is so great. That same love calls the church to disciple all nations and to love our neighbor and our enemy with a mind like Christ's - a mind that loves each and every human being. As we study the gift of Scripture, and seek after our Lord, guide us to walk in your way. We entrust this time to you, and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*(Keith Gustine)*

## Focus Statement

The life of Christ provides a model for our whole lives as well as our response to the contemporary issues of immigration.

## Group Discussion

The facilitator should be prepared to summarize key points from the "Introduction to the Study" (see page 2), setting the tone for an open and respectful discussion. Participants should then take turns briefly answering one of the following questions out loud:

- Why do you think immigration is such a hot topic?
- What concerns you the most about the issue of immigration?
- Do you think these are issues that should be discussed in the church? Why or why not?

## Biblical Reflection

Choose some or all of the following passages to read aloud and discuss (see page 15):

Matthew 2:12-18

- If Mary, Joseph and Jesus attempted to enter the United States today, do you think they would be able to enter easily and legally? Why or why not?

Matthew 8:5-13

- When Jesus praises a symbol of foreign dominance and corruption (the Centurion) for having more faith in God than all of Israel, how do you think the people around him reacted? Does Je-

sus' acceptance of a foreigner change how we treat people who make their new homes in our communities?

Matthew 25:31-46

- Who are the "strangers" in Matthew 25? Does this include all immigrants? Why or why not?
- Jesus never explicitly addresses the issue of immigration. How can his life and teaching help us develop a Christ-like response to this issue?

Luke 10:25-37

- Do you see any connections between the relationship of Jews and Samaritans in the first century, and native-born Americans and immigrants in the 21st century? Why or why not?

Philippians 2:5-11

- In Philippians, we are told to have a mind like Christ. What kind of mind is this? How is this way of thinking reflected in Christ's life? What does having this mind mean for our attitude towards others, including undocumented immigrants?

## Activity: Migration Map

Before we get started with drawing our maps, answer the following questions:

- What year did the members of your family arrive in the United States? (If you don't know, it's possible that your family has been here for five or six generations and arrived before restrictive U.S. immigration laws were implemented. See page 25 for a historical timeline of U.S. immigration laws.)
- Where were your grandparents born? (What town/state/country?)
- Where were your parents born?
- Where were you born?
- Do you currently live in the town in which your grandparents were born? Your parents? If not, where do you live now? How far is that from where your parents and grandparents were born?
- For those with adult children or grandchildren, where do they live? How far away do they live?

Once you have answered these questions begin to construct a map of your family's movements.

1. On the center of the page draw a dot and write the name of a town and the year your grandparents or parents moved there.
2. In any direction draw a dashed line ( - - - ) to another dot. Each dash can represent 1 mile, or those from very far away can use other symbols and designate

the numeric value (e.g. \* = 10 miles; + = 100 miles). Label the new dot with the name of the location and family member who moved there.

3. Continue this process with each dot until your grandparents, parents, yourself, children and grandchildren (if you have them) are on the page.
4. Share your maps with one another and note the journey your fellow participants have taken.

## Video: Undocumented.tv

Answer this question before you watch the video: When you hear the word “immigrant” or “undocumented” what first comes to mind?

Watch the video from Undocumented.tv (Short clip - 2 min; Long clip - 9 min). *The short clip is available on the DVD. The long clip is available for download or streaming online at: [www.undocumented.tv](http://www.undocumented.tv). If you'd like to order the digital download, please use this event code: #NCCC11.*

Respond to these questions:

- Which of the Scriptures from this lesson relates to the situation of Michael's family and their church?
- Does the life of Jesus lead us to welcome Michael's family into our community? If Jesus can welcome and love a Centurion, can we welcome and love a peaceful family?
- Having watched the clip, have any of the ideas you had about “immigrant” or “undocumented” changed? How?
- Michael and his family visit Ellis Island, which was the first point of arrival for many immigrants to the United States historically. Thinking about the migration map you made, how might your own immigrant history affect how you think about immigrants today? Do these maps matter to Jesus? Why or why not?
- Michael's family came to faith in Jesus here in the United States. Was one of the words that came to mind before you watched this video “Christian”? Why or Why not?
- Regardless of immigrants' faith traditions, what could the church do to reach out to people recently arrived in America?
- In the film, Pastor Felix suggests that the fact that we have received grace from God should inform the way that we interact with undocumented immigrants. What do you think?

## Closing Prayer

Loving God, help us to remember that when we speak of immigrants and refugees, we speak of those whom you love. Let our lives be guided by the life of our Lord Jesus

Christ. Give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear how Christ's life and teaching demands love of all people.

Grant us humility so that we may have the courage to live according to the witness of the eternally begotten Son, a poor refugee in a foreign dominated land.

In Scripture Jesus promises that he will be in us. Therefore, as he loves, let us love. As he shared, let us share. As he taught, let us teach. As he cared, let us care. The Kingdom of God is open to all, so let all who desire pray as Christ taught us to pray saying... [The Lord's Prayer]

*(Keith Gustine)*

## Learn More: Faith-Based Resources

### Books

- *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* by M. Daniel Carroll R.
- *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion and Truth in the Immigration Debate* by Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang
- *Deporting Our Souls: Values, Morality and Immigration Policy* by Bill Ong Hing

### Organizations & Websites

- American Friends Service Committee ([afsc.org/project/immigrants-rights](http://afsc.org/project/immigrants-rights))
- Church World Service ([churchworldservice.org](http://churchworldservice.org))
- Conservatives for Comprehensive Immigration Reform ([conservativesforcir.org](http://conservativesforcir.org))
- Interfaith Immigration Coalition ([interfaithimmigration.org](http://interfaithimmigration.org))
- National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference ([nhclc.org](http://nhclc.org))
- NC Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants ([welcometheimmigrant.org](http://welcometheimmigrant.org))
- Sojourners ([faithandimmigration.org](http://faithandimmigration.org))
- World Relief ([worldrelief.org](http://worldrelief.org))



# Lesson Two: Bible Stories

*Note: This session and the next one (Lesson Three) can be combined into one session if time requires. See page 21.*

## Opening Prayer

Loving God, hear our prayers for the many people around the world who are struggling for the basic necessities of life. In this time of hardship for so many, we are especially mindful of refugees forced from their homelands because of who they are or what they believe. We are also mindful of those who live in extreme poverty, who see no way out, and who – like us – want a better life for their children. Help us to trust that you will not allow our jug of oil and jar of meal to empty as we seek to love both our familiar and new neighbors, both the “Israelite” and the “Samaritan,” so we can witness to your unfailing love. Amen.

*(Adapted from World Refugee Day 2009 worship resource, <http://www.ucc.org/refugees/pdf/WRD-2009-Worship-Resource.pdf>)*

## Reflection on Previous Session

Do the life and teaching of Jesus Christ inform our perspective on immigration? If so, how?

## Focus Statement

Much of the Bible follows people who travel and learn how to live in other countries. These Scriptures teach us about immigrants and their relationship to the people with whom they live as outsiders. What do these stories teach us about God’s perspective?

## Biblical Reflection

Read the following passages aloud (see page 16):  
Genesis 39:1-23; 41:53-42:5  
Daniel 1:1-15

Respond to the following questions:

- How is Joseph’s story one of migration?
- Do you think Joseph’s status as an immigrant had an impact on Potiphar’s judgment? If so, was it fair?

- How do the Bible verses on ancient Israel’s economic dealings challenge the way we think about our economy today?
- For a Babylonian to be told by an Israelite that Babylonian food could defile a person seems like a harsh critique. How did God affect the outcome of this scenario, and what does the outcome show about God’s intentions?
- What does the story of Daniel - including the episodes of the fiery furnace and the lion’s den - tell us about God’s love and protection for immigrants?
- This week’s Bible passages highlight the different ways that immigrants relate to the cultures of their new homelands. Joseph seems to adopt many Egyptian practices, while Daniel steadfastly holds to his own religious traditions in a foreign land. What do these different examples mean for us – and our expectations of immigrants – today?

## Activity: Role Playing

Get into small groups of two or three. Distribute the *Character Cards* (included with this curriculum). These are short stories about real-life characters who are affected by immigration in some way. Make sure that everyone in your small group has a different character.

Take about 5 minutes to read about your character and think about immigration from his or her perspective.

Think about your answers to the following questions from your character’s perspective:

1. How has your life been affected by immigration?
2. When you reflect on your experience of immigration, how do you feel? Why do you feel this way? Does this feeling matter to you?

After about five minutes, take turns introducing yourself **in your own words** (don’t just read the card) to your small group.

What is your story?

What are your answers to Questions 1 and 2?

Be imaginative and creative.

## Video: “El Sol”

Background: This film clip about El Sol Neighborhood Resource Center (4 min) comes from a recent documentary called *Brother Towns / Pueblos Hermanos*. It is a story of two towns linked by immigration, family, and work: Jacaltenango, a highland Maya town in Guatemala; and Jupiter, a coastal resort town where many Jacaltecos have settled in Florida.

*Brother Towns* chronicles a story of how and why people migrate across borders, how people make and remake their communities when they travel thousands of miles.

*Brother Towns* is available for groups to watch together. Get more info at: [www.brothertowns.com](http://www.brothertowns.com).

Watch the clip and respond to the following questions:

- Why was El Sol founded?
- What are some of the benefits that El Sol offers the community? Are there any drawbacks?
- What was the approach taken by elected officials in the film? Do you think it was a good approach? Why or why not? What other options are available for churches that want to make a difference?

## Closing Prayer

For the World and Its Peoples

O God, you are the hope in all of the earth, the God of all spirits of all flesh. Hear our humble intercession for all races and families on earth, that you will turn all hearts to yourself. Remove from our minds sin that leads to hatred, prejudice, and contempt for those who we are not familiar with, so that through the gifts of faith, hope and love we may by you be brought into Your kingdom, in grace and peace. Amen.

(Adapted from the United Methodist Book of Worship, p. 524)

## Learn More: The Immigration System

### Books

- *Americans in Waiting: The Lost Story of Citizenship in the United States* by Hiroshi Motomura
- *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit* by Daniel Groody
- *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* by Ruben Martinez
- *Enrique’s Journey: The Story of a Boy’s Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother* by Sonia Nazario
- *Getting Immigration Right: What Every American Needs to Know* ed. by David Coates and Peter Siavelis
- *The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers’ Lives, Labor, and Advocacy* by Charles D. Thompson, Jr. & Melinda F. Wiggins
- *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* by David Bacon
- *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* by Daniel Groody and Gioacchino Campese
- *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration* by Miguel A. de la Torre

### Organizations & Websites

- America’s Voice ([americasvoiceonline.org](http://americasvoiceonline.org))
- Immigration Policy Center ([immigrationpolicy.org](http://immigrationpolicy.org))
- National Immigration Law Center ([nilc.org](http://nilc.org))
- American Immigration Lawyers Association ([aiala.org](http://aiala.org))



Photo: José Galvez

# Lesson Three: Economies

*Note: This session and the previous one (Lesson Two) can be combined into one session if time requires. See page 21.*

## Opening Prayer

God, we come before you in prayer affirming that all people are loved by you. Some of us in this country through many centuries come from native peoples whose history in this land has no recorded beginning.

God, be with your children.

Some of us in this country through many centuries come from Spanish, French, and English sailors who came to conquer a new world.

God, be with your children.

Some of us in this country through a couple of centuries come from Africans who were forced to come as slaves.

God, be with your children.

Some of us in this country through a couple of centuries come from Asians desperate for a way to earn a living.

God, be with your children.

Some of us in this country through this century come from Latin Americans fleeing oppression and seeking a way to feed their children.

God, we are all your children, because in and through Christ you adopted us. Unite us into a loving family. Amen.

*(Adapted from Disciples Home Missions, <http://www.discipleshome-missions.org/files/RIMKtKPrayers.pdf>)*

## Reflection on Previous Session

Since talking last week, have you thought of any additional Bible stories involving migration? What can we learn from these stories? What does it mean for us as Christians that the hopes, dreams and prayers of immigrants are important to God?

## Focus Statement

Immigration is really about work and family. Most immigrants want nothing more than to be able to provide for their families through hard work. Migration away from desperate poverty and towards areas of relative wealth has always been happening in human history. Scripture tells of faithful people who migrated, sometimes under false pretenses, to support their family.

## Biblical Reflection

Read the following passages aloud (see page 17):

Genesis 12:10-20

Ruth 1:6-22

Respond to the following questions:

- Have you ever had an experience like Abram's? Have you ever left a place not knowing where you are going?
- Why did Abram leave the land promised to him (verse 10)? What was he most concerned about in the land of Egypt? How are these experiences similar to other immigrant stories you have heard?
- Naomi tells Ruth not to come with her because Ruth would be a foreigner in Israel. Why does Ruth follow her anyway? Is Ruth doing this for herself or for Naomi?
- How does the economy play a part in these stories?

## Video: "Labor & Coffee"

Background: This film clip, which focuses on two families, also comes from *Brother Towns / Pueblos Hermanos*. Watch the video clip about day laborers Jesús and Angela and coffee farmers Pancho and Romelia (8 min), and respond to these questions:

- How would you feel if you were not able to provide basic necessities for your family? How do you think you would respond?
- In the film, Jesús holds his son and says, "God is a good God" and that he has faith that he will find a good job. What can we learn from the faith of Jesús? How has your faith helped you in the midst of difficult circumstances?
- Romelia describes how their family income does not cover their expenses. She says, "It is not enough." What kind of difficult choices do these hard econom-

ic realities force her family to make? Where do you turn when your income “is not enough”?

- As Christians, how might we respond to situations like that of both couples in the film?

## Group Discussion

Read the “Lesson Three Information Sheet” (see page 22), and respond to the following questions:

- Was any of this information surprising to you? If so, what and why?
- What is your source for information about immigration?
- Why do you think someone would endure awful working conditions?
- How do immigrants contribute to your community, your church, and your place of employment?
- Given the impact of recent economic events on all families, what might an appropriate Christian response be to those in the community who are struggling to find work and support their families?

## Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, when you multiplied the loaves and fish, you provided nourishment for the body, and in the bread and the wine you offered your own body to us as a sign of God’s saving covenant. The Holy Spirit came to us on Pentecost, granting peace and guidance to the church in the midst of a confusing world. God, you pour out yourself and give compassion, showing us that we should pour out ourselves and give compassion to our neighbors to live out the adoption by which you have accepted us.

Lord Jesus, you call us to care for one another in love. Give us the courage and wisdom to do so in such a way that gives glory to you alone, and shares your love with everyone. Amen.

*(Keith Gustine)*



Photo: Charles Thompson



## Closing Prayer

### A Litany for Ministry with Uprooted People

Leader: Almighty God, thanks be to you for your love and goodness showered on us each day. We praise you for the gift of your Son, our Savior, in whom we have forgiveness and abundant life. We give you thanks for your Holy Spirit who keeps us in faith.

Congregation: We thank you for the gifts of life, family, friends, and home. We are grateful especially for the caring of others in our times of need. Lead us to show our thankfulness to you by caring for others in their times of need.

L: O God, teach us how to show your justice and kindness to uprooted people who are often unknown, forgotten, or cast aside in our world today. Give us courage to step out in faith with you, to speak out and befriend the men and women, boys and girls who need freedom and healing to make life whole.

C: Stir us by your love. Move us to be messengers of your good tidings to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to comfort all who mourn, to give them a garland instead of ashes so that you may be glorified.

L: Almighty God, we pray for peace in our world. We pray for the leaders and people of other nations as well as our own, that all may see the glory of your ways and seek to work for peace with others. We thank you for renewing and restoring our lives every day. Turn us around when we have lost our way. Open our hearts to open doors for uprooted people.

C: We thank you for the resurrection surprises you continue to bestow. Inspire and lead us that we may lift up your love for humanity in ministry with uprooted people. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

*(From Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, <http://www.lirs.org/atf/cf/%7BA9DDBA5E-C6B5-4C63-89DE-91D2F09A28CA%7D/Litany%20for%20Ministry%20with%20Uprooted%20People.pdf>)*



Photo: Peter Eversoll

A young farmworker picks blueberries in North Carolina. Visit [www.ncfan.org](http://www.ncfan.org) to learn more about farmworker conditions.

# Lesson Five: Immigration Enforcement

*Note: This session and the previous one (Lesson Four) can be combined into one session if time requires. See page 21.*

## Opening Prayer

Holy Trinity, perfect community and perfect love, we worship and adore you. Your very nature shows us that we, being made in the Divine Image, are not created to be alone. All humanity has been given families and friends that reflect the self-giving character of the Triune God. We give thanks for all these blessings not only for ourselves, but also for our neighbors. Give us the eyes to see how important families are to everyone and to you. Help us to be compassionate toward those refugees and immigrants whose families have been separated. Protect people moving to reunite with family. Amen.

*(Keith Gustine)*

## Reflection on Previous Session

What stood out the most to you from last week's Bible passages? Was playing the Immigration Board Game fun or helpful?

## Focus Statement

Local enforcement of federal immigration law raises many questions about the relationship between immigrant communities and local law enforcement. As Christians, what are our responsibilities in this situation? How do we love our neighbors?

## Biblical Reflection

Read the following passages aloud (see page 18):

Matthew 12:1-13

Romans 12:9-21

Romans 13:1-10

Respond to the following questions:

- How do these passages describe human laws? What is the appropriate role for laws when it comes to protecting vulnerable people?
- In Matthew 12, Jesus questions the way that the

Pharisees elevated laws over people. What are the implications of this passage for us today?

- Given that Scripture commands us to love one another in such a way that does not repay evil for evil, but repays evil with loving goodness and charity, what is our role towards people on all sides of the current immigration debate?
- How does Romans 13:8-10 inform our understanding of Romans 13:1-7? Do you see any tension between being model citizens and, as Paul says, neither repaying anyone evil for evil nor doing any harm to our neighbors?

## Video: "Phone Calls From Papi"

Background: This film clip comes from an online resource called *Facing Deportation* ([www.facingdeportation.org](http://www.facingdeportation.org)). This website contains many resources that document local immigration enforcement in North Carolina.

Watch the video clip "Phone Calls From Papi" (4 min).

Respond to the following questions:

- What is the impact on a family when someone is deported? What are the challenges?
- How long had Domingo (the husband) been waiting to get legal permanent residency status? Do you think he should have been deported while he was waiting? Why or why not?
- In what ways can the church respond to situations like this that other groups and the government cannot?

## Video: "A Father's Sacrifice"

This film clip also comes from *Facing Deportation*. Watch the video "A Father's Sacrifice" (4 min) and respond to the following questions:

- How would you feel if you became separated from one of your children? How do you think you would respond?
- Throughout the film, Ignacio (the father) describes his feelings. How would you characterize his feelings about the situation?
- What crime was Juan (the son) accused of? Do you think he was guilty? Why or why not?
- How would you want your church to respond if this happened to you or your family?

## Group Discussion

Read the “Lesson Five Information Sheet” (see pages 23-24) and review the “Immigration Law Timeline” (see pages 25-26) and respond to the following questions:

- What did you learn from this information?
- The timeline demonstrates the long history of immigration in the United States. How does the fact that this issue is not new to our context affect your view of immigration?
- Under our current immigration system, for the vast majority of workers, there is no “line” to stand in to enter the U.S. legally. Does this fact affect your view of undocumented immigrants?
- If your family member had been abused or robbed, would you want him or her to feel safe contacting the authorities to get help? How would you respond if your victimized loved one were arrested and taken away after reporting a crime?

## Closing Prayer

Lord, please remember all who come to America as immigrants and refugees, especially children separated from their families. Lead them to safe homes, that they might live in peace and be reunited with loved ones.

Lord, please remember all who have fled their homelands to seek asylum in the United States, especially those in detention. Grant them strength and hope to endure, and grant them protection and peace.

Lord, please remember all who have found refuge or asylum in the United States. Bless and prosper their families in their new homeland, and strengthen them in the time of adjustment. We pray that they will find a church community who will take care of their needs.

Lord, please remember churches, agencies and individuals that serve vulnerable newcomers. Give them wisdom, patience, perseverance and love to minister effectively.

Lord, thank you for your love that welcomes us as newcomers. Guide us that we might continue to be a blessing for their lives as you have been for ours. Amen.

*(Adapted from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, [http://www.lirs.org/site/c.nhLPJ0PMKuG/b.5608987/k.A586/Pray\\_for\\_Welcome.htm](http://www.lirs.org/site/c.nhLPJ0PMKuG/b.5608987/k.A586/Pray_for_Welcome.htm))*

## Learn More: Immigration & Local Enforcement

### Reports

Available at: [welcometheimmigrant.org/reports](http://welcometheimmigrant.org/reports)

- *The 287(g) Program: The Costs and Consequences of Local Immigration Enforcement in North Carolina Communities*
- *Brick By Brick: A Half-Decade of Immigration Enforcement and the Need for Comprehensive Immigration Reform*
- *Costs & Consequences: The High Price of Policing Immigrant Communities*
- *Delegation and Divergence: A Study of 287(g) State and Local Immigration Enforcement*
- *Forcing Our Blues Into Gray Areas: Local Police and Federal Law Enforcement*
- *Is More Getting Us Less? Real Solutions for Securing Our Borders*
- *The Policies and Politics of Local Immigration Enforcement Laws: 287(g) Program in North Carolina*
- *Torn Apart by Immigration Enforcement: Parental Rights and Immigration Detention*
- *Unconstitutional and Costly: The High Price of Local Immigration Enforcement*



Photo: Matt Hildreth

# Lesson Six: The Bible & Citizenship

## Opening Prayer

Lord of all nations, in whom we live and move and have our being, help us understand what it means to be citizens of your kingdom. Open our hearts and expand our vision to your love and its implications for our lives. Open our eyes to see the blessing of your kingdom in our daily routines. Enliven us by the movement of the Holy Spirit to witness to the power and love in your authority and rule. Empower us to practice active love and practical engagement with those excluded by society. Lead us Lord, to be more genuine disciples and students open to learning from you, our master and savior. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*(Rennie Salata and Keith Gustine)*

## Reflection on Previous Session

How has the investigation of United States immigration law alongside the biblical witness for how to treat immigrants affected the way you think about immigrants today?

## Focus Statement

Questions about immigration are closely tied to questions about citizenship, and citizenship is about belonging. As Christians, our notions of who belongs and who doesn't might be different from society's standards. The Apostle Paul uses the language of citizenship in a challenging way.

## Biblical Reflection

Read the following passages aloud (see page 19):

Ephesians 2:17-22

Philippians 3:17-20

Matthew 22:15-22

Respond to the following questions:

- Why do you think Paul uses the word "citizen"?
- How do we become citizens of heaven and members of the household of God?
- What are some of the marks of our citizenship as Christians? How are these different from or similar to American citizenship?

- The story of taxes in Matt. 22 has implications for more than money. How does this story help us as we think about citizenship in both the U.S. and God's Kingdom?
- The use of 'image' is very important. Things are made in the image of who makes them. Human beings are made in the image of God, so how can we give others and ourselves to God?

## Activity: Reflecting

The facilitator will allow a few minutes for participants to meditate on these questions. Take some time to think about your experience in this study. If it helps, write out your answers:

- What have you learned? What would like to know more about?
- Did God reveal anything different from what you were expecting? If so, what?
- Has this been a difficult conversation to engage in over the course? Why or why not?
- What is one practical thing you can do in your local congregation or community to witness to Christ particularly with the issue of immigration?

If you are comfortable, spend a few minutes sharing your reflections either in small groups or with everyone.

## Video: "Interview with Ismael"

Background: This film clip was produced by Uniting NC, a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering constructive dialogue about immigration issues in NC ([www.unitingnc.org](http://www.unitingnc.org)). Watch the video interview with United Methodist pastor Rev. Ismael Ruiz-Milan (3 min) and respond to the following questions:

- What did you find out about Ismael that seemed particularly interesting?
- How did God's plan change his story?
- Ismael mentions a love of seasons, the small town, and a desire to work, learn English and have his own "American Dream." How are Ismael's loves and desires similar to your own?

- Have you ever had to make sacrifices similar to Ismael's to achieve your dreams? If so, what were the circumstances?
- How would you respond if you found out that Ismael was going to be your next pastor?

## Group Discussion

Read the "Testimonies from Congregations" and "Get Involved" sections for this week (see pages 27-29) and respond to the following questions:

- What might be some of the barriers to implementing the practical ideas you read?
- What changes might the church have to make in order to accommodate these practical ideas?
- Were any of the initiatives or programs exciting to you? If so, which ones and why?
- What other practical responses to the issue of immigration can this congregation make?

## Closing Prayer

Leader: Glorious God, for the opportunity to gather and explore the issues surrounding immigration, our state, and our local community,

People: Lord, we give you thanks.

Leader: For the ways in which we have been challenged to grow, learned what we did not know and come closer together through faithful discussion,

People: Lord, we give you thanks.

Leader: As a people called out of slavery to sin and death into freedom in Christ, from darkness to light and from the margins of our hearts to the center of your love,

People: Lord, we give you thanks.

Leader: For the acceptance that we find in your love revealed in Jesus Christ that welcomes us as strangers and seeks out the lost, knowing no boundaries,

People: Lord, we give you thanks.

Leader: With humility and compassion, we embark on a continuing journey of faith in the light of your love and mercy to welcome the stranger in our midst. For this and all your blessings,

People: Lord, we give you thanks.

*(Rennie Salata)*



Photo: Chris Liu-Beers

Town Hall Meeting on Immigration Reform, Congregational United Church of Christ, Greensboro, NC.

All texts from the NRSV.

## Lesson One

### Matthew 2:12-18

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. 13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” 14 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” 16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: 18 “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

### Matthew 8:5-13

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him 6 and saying, ‘Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, in terrible distress.’ 7 And he said to him, ‘I will come and cure him.’ 8 The centurion answered, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, “Go”, and he goes, and to another, “Come”, and he comes, and to my slave, “Do this”, and the slave does it.’ 10 When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11 I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, 12 while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 13 And to the centurion Jesus said, ‘Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.’ And the servant was healed in that hour.

### Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him,

and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44 Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ 45 Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

### Luke 10:25-37

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” 29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to

an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

### **Philippians 2:5-11**

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, 8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

## **Lesson Two**

### **Genesis 39:1-23**

Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. 2 The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. 3 His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. 4 So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. 5 From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field. 6 So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate. Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. 7 And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." 8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. 9 He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" 10 And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. 11 One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, 12 she caught hold of his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. 13 When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, 14 she called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See, my husband has brought among us

a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; 15 and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." 16 Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, 17 and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; 18 but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." 19 When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. 20 And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22 The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. 23 The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

### **Genesis 41:53-42:5**

The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; 54 and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in every country, but throughout the land of Egypt there was bread. 55 When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, "Go to Joseph; what he says to you, do." 56 And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. 57 Moreover, all the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine became severe throughout the world. When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you keep looking at one another? 2 I have heard," he said, "that there is grain in Egypt; go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." 3 So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. 5 Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

### **Daniel 1:1-15**

In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 The Lord let King Jehoiakim of Judah fall into his power, as well as some of the vessels of the house of God. These he brought to the land of Shinar, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his gods. 3 Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 young men with-

out physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king's palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court. 6 Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah. 7 The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego. 8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself. 9 Now God allowed Daniel to receive favour and compassion from the palace master. 10 The palace master said to Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your own age, you would endanger my head with the king.' 11 Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 12 'Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according to what you observe.' 14 So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations.

## Lesson Three

### Genesis 12:10-20

Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land. 11 When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, "I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; 12 and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife'; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. 13 Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account." 14 When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. 15 When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. 16 And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels. 17 But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. 18 So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your

wife, take her, and be gone." 20 And Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had.

### Ruth 1:6-22

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.' Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. 10 They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.' 11 But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, 13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.' 14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' 16 But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!' 18 When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. 19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?' 20 She said to them, 'Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?' 22 So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

## Lesson Four

### Exodus 12:49

There shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.

### Exodus 23:9

You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

### Leviticus 19:33-34

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. 34 The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

### Deuteronomy 1:16

I charged your judges at that time: "Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien.

### Deuteronomy 10:19

You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

### Deuteronomy 27:19

"Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice." All the people shall say, "Amen!"

### Ezekiel 22:29

The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the alien without redress.

### Malachi 3:5

Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

### Hebrews 13:2

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

## Lesson Five

### Matthew 12:1-13

At that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.' 3 He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his

companions were hungry? 4 He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. 5 Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? 6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice", you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.' 9 He left that place and entered their synagogue; 10 a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, 'Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?' so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, 'Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.' 13 Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other.

### Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' 20 No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### Romans 13:1-10

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject,

not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. 6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is due to them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due. 8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

## Lesson Six

### **Ephesians 2:17-22**

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

### **Philippians 3:17-20**

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18 For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Matthew 22:15-22**

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 16 So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. 20 Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' 21 They answered, 'The emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.



Photo: Chris Liu-Beers

Clergy gather to discuss immigration from theological perspectives at All Souls Episcopal Cathedral, Asheville, NC.

# Facilitator's Guide

Helping a congregation work through a “hot-button” topic like immigration from a faith standpoint can be extremely challenging, and yet the spiritual rewards for a congregation can far exceed the difficulties. This curriculum is designed to be very interactive and conversational. There is also a lot of flexibility built in so you can focus on the areas that are most important to your group. The curriculum is designed to run for six sessions, but for groups with less time there is also an option for four weeks (see next page). Here are some suggested time guidelines based on a one-hour session:

- Opening Prayer (1 min)
- Reflection on Previous Section (5 min)
- Focus Statement (1 min)
- Biblical Reflection and Questions (10-15 min)
- Activity (15-20 min)
- Video and Questions (10-15 min)
- Group Discussion (15-20 min)
- Closing Prayer (3 min)

## Prepare

- Pray for discernment and guidance.
- Clarify your goals: Is there one specific outcome you are aiming for? Do you simply want to begin the discussion, or are you hoping for specific action? Is there a particular situation in your faith community that makes this a pressing and/or emotional issue?
- Take time to sort through your own feelings/opinions/level of knowledge about this issue. Controversial issues are often complex, multilayered. What aspects of it do you need to read up on? Decide whether you intend to remain neutral or if you intend to make your opinions clear, but in a way that does not dismiss the feelings/opinions of others. (Many people find that it is most effective to be clear about your stance, be honest about areas of uncertainty, and constantly make it clear you intend to listen with respect and to learn from all views.)
- Be prepared with intelligent and articulate resources. Encourage your congregants to use only reliable, well-respected sources of information.
- Make sure the appropriate bodies are fully informed about the program.
- Don't settle for a surface level conversation. Go deeper. Keep in mind that those with very strong opinions may not change their views much. Focus most of your energy on those in the middle; many of them will welcome the opportunity to learn, to ask their questions, and to consider the issue thoughtfully.

## Implement

- Do everything possible to create safe space for all. Establish guidelines and model respectful dialogue. Make clear what is and is not appropriate in discussion.
- Keep praying. And practice good self-care – this is stressful work!
- If necessary, before beginning the curriculum, offer to meet with any individuals who have concerns about this topic or this curriculum. Invite people privately to share their views, and be ready to explain very clearly why you think this curriculum is necessary, why now, and how you think it will benefit the congregation.
- Publicize your programs on this topic well. Make it clear that the intention is to create a safe space where all are welcome to come together to share their insights, to learn, to listen and to seek divine wisdom and direction.
- Be patient. This issue is obviously very difficult for many to talk about. At the same time, there will be others wanting the discussions to progress more quickly.

## Follow-Up

- Be aware that this will be an on-going effort. Most congregations find that they reach a certain level of understanding, only to discover more issues or other groups of people they had not considered. It is a process.
- Be aware, too, that this process, as challenging as it can be, also frequently results in blessings for the congregation in terms of spiritual renewal and outlook. Congregations grow in confidence when they can look back and know that they dealt with a “hot-button” issue with grace and integrity.
- Consider what might be appropriate next steps: Further study? An outreach effort? Advocacy?
- Summarize and celebrate. With the help of congregation leaders and participants, write up a summary of the journey and the outcomes. Be honest about where there are areas of disagreement, point out blessings discovered along the way. Remind the congregation that they have courageously worked through a difficult issue and lived to tell the tale. Consider a special service of worship and time for celebration to mark this accomplishment.

Adapted from Rev. Julie Peebles, “Dealing with Controversial Issues in Faith Communities,” available online at [www.welcometheimmigrant.org/toolbox](http://www.welcometheimmigrant.org/toolbox).

## How to Adapt this Curriculum for 4 or 5 Lessons

This curriculum is designed to be as flexible as possible so that you can spend the right amount of time on it in your own setting. While it is organized for six weeks, the instructions here explain how to combine certain lessons in order to complete the whole study in as little as four sessions.

### Session One: No Changes

### Session Two: Combine Lessons Two and Three

- Choose one Opening Prayer (p. 5 or 7).
- Read both Focus Statements (p. 5 and 7).
- Proceed with Biblical Reflection, Role Playing, “Labor & Coffee” video, and the Group Discussion on page 6.
- The “El Sol” video is optional, depending on time.
- Choose one Closing Prayer (p. 6 or 8)

### Session Three: Combine Lessons Four and Five

- Choose one Opening Prayer (p. 9 or 11).
- Read both Focus Statements (p. 9 and 11).
- Proceed with Biblical Reflection, Immigration Board Game, “Phone Calls from Papi” video, and the Group Discussion on page 11.
- The video “A Father’s Sacrifice” is optional, depending on time.
- Choose one Closing Prayer (p. 10 or 12)

### Session Four: No Changes



Photo: José Galvez

Immigrant workers processing crabs by hand in North Carolina.

# Lesson Three Information Sheet

Before we examine some facts about immigrants and the economy, it is important to note that many debates about immigration begin and end with an economic question: Do immigrants give more to the economy than they take?

While this is an important public policy question, as Christians we are called to examine these issues in light of the Bible.

Do you think we are called to love our immigrant neighbors less if it turns out they are a burden to the economy? Should we extend a more genuine welcome if they contribute more than they cost? These are important questions for Christians.

At the same time, it is very helpful to have accurate information about these issues:

- Job loss and economic recession are common factors in motivating people in any place to relocate in order to find work.<sup>1</sup>
- Undocumented workers contribute more to the economy (in the form of taxes, economic growth provided by undocumented labor, and consumer spending) than they receive in benefits from various governments.<sup>2</sup>
  - For the U.S. as a whole, the immediate negative effect of eliminating the undocumented workforce would include an estimated \$1.757 trillion in annual lost spending, \$651.511 billion in annual lost output, and 8.1 million lost jobs.<sup>3</sup>
- Nearly all undocumented workers pay sales taxes and property taxes (through rent or home ownership), and many also pay social security and income taxes.<sup>4</sup>

- Undocumented workers contribute \$7 billion annually to the Social Security System even though they are ineligible to receive benefits.<sup>5</sup>
- Undocumented workers make up about 5% of the U.S. workforce and commonly occupy jobs that are labor intensive, dangerous and offer low wages and no benefits.<sup>6</sup>
  - Industries where undocumented workers make up a large share of the labor force include private household industries, food manufacturing, farming, furniture manufacturing, construction, textile manufacturing, food services, administrative and support services, accommodations, and selected elements of the manufacturing industry.
- Certain businesses want access to pools of immigrants as a cheap and reliable source of labor because they are less likely to complain about working conditions and are more easily denied wages and other services.<sup>7</sup>
- Non-citizen immigrants are much more vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy.<sup>8</sup>
- As goods and services move more and more freely across borders, we should expect labor to increasingly do the same.<sup>9</sup>
- “Immigration is not only about the reasons and mechanics of the move to another place; it is about life in that new setting.”<sup>10</sup>
- “Poverty, injustice and armed conflict displace millions of people across the globe... including economic migrants compelled to move to provide for their families, refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing persecution, and victims of human trafficking. The vast majority [of immigrants] are economic migrants who have few options to remain in their countries of origin.”<sup>11</sup>

1 Carroll R., M. Daniel, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2008), 55.

2 The Perryman Group, “An Essential Resource: An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Undocumented Workers on Business Activity in the US with Estimated Effects by State and by Industry,” 2008. Available online at: [http://americansforimmigrationreform.com/files/Impact\\_of\\_the\\_Undocumented\\_Workforce.pdf](http://americansforimmigrationreform.com/files/Impact_of_the_Undocumented_Workforce.pdf)

3 Ibid.

4 Immigration Policy Center, “Assessing the Economic Impact of Immigration at the State and Local Level,” 2008.

5 Testimony of Patrick P. O’Carroll, Jr., Inspector General of the Social Security Administration, before the U.S. Senate, Committee on Finance, regarding “Administrative Challenges Facing the Social Security Administration,” March 14, 2006.

6 Pew Hispanic Center, “Unauthorized Immigrant Population: National and State Trends, 2010,” 2011.

7 Rakesh Kochhar, “Sharp Decline in Income for Non-Citizen Immigrant Households, 2006-2007,” Pew Hispanic Center, available at <http://pewhispanic.org/reports/report.php?ReportID=95>.

8 Kochhar, “Latino Labor Report,” 2008.

9 Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 55.

10 Ibid, 71.

11 Maryland Catholic Conference, “The Root Causes of Migration.”

# Lesson Five Information Sheet

## Immigration Status

The percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign-born now stands at 12%; in the early 20th century it was approximately 15%.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of foreign-born U.S. residents are not undocumented. About 30% of foreign-born U.S. residents are undocumented, while about 34% percent are naturalized citizens and 32% are legal permanent residents (i.e. Green Card holders).<sup>2</sup>

There are three main ways that a foreign-born individual can gain legal status in the U.S. For the vast majority of the world, none of these three paths is available:

- Through **family-sponsored immigration**, a U.S. citizen can sponsor his or her foreign-born spouse, parent (if the sponsor is over the age of 21), minor and adult married and unmarried children, and brothers and sisters. A Legal Permanent Resident can sponsor his or her spouse, minor children, and adult unmarried children. However, the backlog in the family-based system means that family members are often separated for many years.
- Through **employment-based immigration**, a U.S. employer can sponsor an individual for a specific position where there is a demonstrated absence of U.S. workers. However, the employer-based system is also onerous and lengthy, and some employers choose to hire undocumented people.
- Through obtaining **refugee or asylum** status, in which an individual must prove that he or she was the victim of persecution in his or her home country under one of the five protected areas (race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion). An applicant must apply within the year one enters the U.S. It is a very time-consuming process because one has to document all allegations of persecution. It is always difficult to find such documentation.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Nation's Foreign-Born Population Nears 37 Million," online at: [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/foreignborn\\_population/cb10-159.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/foreignborn_population/cb10-159.html). See also: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/DataHub/charts/final.fb.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> National Immigration Law Center, "Immigration & Immigrant Workers," 2008.

## Concerns with Local Enforcement

The Major Cities Chiefs – a national organization of police chiefs – note that "Immigration enforcement by local police would likely negatively affect and undermine the level of trust and cooperation between local police and immigrant communities."<sup>3</sup>

This is exactly what has happened across North Carolina. Recently, a woman was detained by her local sheriff's department and turned over to immigration officials for deportation when she called for help after being assaulted by her American husband.<sup>4</sup> The sheriff's office decided to turn the woman over for deportation even after a judge ordered her released, knowing that she was eligible for legal status in the United States.

In Wake County, a man was arrested and turned over to immigration officials after calling 911 to report a robbery in his home.<sup>5</sup> These examples illustrate how local enforcement of immigration law severs the bond of trust between entire communities and law enforcement officials. This loss of trust in turn threatens the safety of everyone since immigrants become less likely to report crimes and to serve as witnesses.

Immigrants are often portrayed as being very prone to criminal activity. However, recent studies have demonstrated that the foreign-born population actually commits fewer crimes than the native-born population.<sup>6</sup>

For example, one study in California found that the foreign-born, who make up about 35 percent of the adult population in California, constitute only about 17 percent of the adult prison population. Thus, immigrants are underrepresented in California prisons compared to their representation in the overall population. In fact, U.S.-born adult men are incarcerated at a rate over two-and-a-half times greater than that of foreign-born men.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, on average between 2000 and 2005, cities that had a higher share of recent immigrants saw their crime rates fall further than cities with a lower share. This finding is especially strong when it comes to violent crime.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Major Cities Chiefs Immigration Committee, "Recommendations for Enforcement of Immigration Laws by Local Police Agencies," available online at: [http://www.houstontx.gov/police/pdfs/mcc\\_position.pdf](http://www.houstontx.gov/police/pdfs/mcc_position.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> FaithAction International House newsletter.

<sup>5</sup> Raleigh News & Observer, "Illegal Immigrant Rethinks 911 Call," Sept. 24, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> California Counts - Population Trends and Profiles, "Crime, Corrections and California: What Does Immigration Have to Do With It?," 2008. Available online at: [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/cacounts/CC\\_208KBCC.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/cacounts/CC_208KBCC.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



# Immigration Law Timeline

1790: Naturalization is authorized for “free white persons” who have resided in the United States for at least two years and swear loyalty to the U.S. Constitution. The racial requirement would remain on the federal books until 1952, although naturalization was opened to certain Asian nationalities in the 1940s.

1798: The Alien and Sedition Acts authorize the President to deport any foreigner deemed to be dangerous and make it a crime to speak, write or publish anything “of a false, scandalous and malicious nature” about the President or Congress. An amended Naturalization Act imposes a 14-year residency requirement for prospective citizens; in 1802, Congress reduces the waiting period to five years, a provision that remains today.

1819: Reporting Rule adopted. Data begin to be collected on immigration into the U.S. Ship captains and others are required to keep and submit manifests of immigrants entering the U.S.

1875: First exclusionary act. Convicts, prostitutes and coolies (Chinese contract laborers) are barred from entry into the U.S.

1882: The Chinese Exclusion Act suspends immigration by Chinese laborers for 10 years; the measure would be extended and tightened in 1892 and a permanent ban enacted in 1902. In addition, a tax is levied on newly arriving immigrants.

1885: Contract laborers entry barred. This new legislation reverses an earlier federal law legalizing the trade in contract labor.

1891: To the list of undesirables ineligible for immigration, Congress adds polygamists, “persons suffering from a loathsome or a dangerous contagious disease,” and those convicted of “a misdemeanor involving moral turpitude.” Also, the Office of Immigration is created. (Now known as U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services.)

1892: Ellis Island opens. Between 1892 and 1953, more than 12 million immigrants will be processed at this one facility.

1903: Additional categories are added for persons excluded. Epileptics, professional beggars and anarchists are now excluded.

1906: The first language requirement is adopted for naturalization: the ability to speak and understand English.

1907: Exclusions are further broadened: “Imbeciles, the feeble-minded, tubercular persons, persons with physical or mental defects” and persons under 16 without parents are excluded.

1907-8: Under a so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement,” the United States promises not to ban Japanese immigration in exchange for Japan’s pledge not to issue passports to Japanese laborers for travel to the continental United States (although they remain welcome to become agricultural workers in Hawaii). By a separate executive order, President Theodore Roosevelt prohibits secondary migration by Japanese from Hawaii to the mainland.

1917: Over President Wilson’s veto, Congress enacts a literacy requirement for all new immigrants: ability to read 40 words in some language. Most significant in limiting the flow of newcomers, it designates Asia as a “barred zone” (excepting Japan and the Philippines) from which immigration will be prohibited.

1921: A new form of immigration restriction is born: the national-origins quota system. Admissions from each European country will be limited to three percent of each foreign-born nationality in the 1910 census. The effect is to favor Northern Europeans at the expense of Southern and Eastern Europeans. Immigration from Western Hemisphere nations remains unrestricted; most Asians will continue to face exclusion.

1924: Restrictionists’ decisive stroke, the Johnson-Reed Act, embodies the principle of preserving America’s “racial” composition. Immigration quotas will be based on the ethnic makeup of the U.S. population as a whole in 1920. The new national-origins quota system is even more discriminatory than the 1921 version. “America must be kept American,” says President Coolidge as he signs the bill into law. Another provision bans all immigration by persons “ineligible to citizenship” — primarily affecting the Japanese.

1927: Immigration Ceiling Further Reduced. The annual immigration ceiling is further reduced to 150,000; the quota is revised to two percent of each nationality’s representation in the 1920 census. This basic law remains in effect through 1965.

1929: National Origins Act. The annual immigration ceiling of 150,000 is made permanent, with 70 percent of admissions slated for those coming from Northern and Western Europe, while the other 30 percent are reserved for those coming from Southern and Eastern Europe.

1943: To appease a wartime ally, a token quota (105) is created for Chinese immigration. Yet unlike white immigrants, whose quotas depend on country of residence, all persons of “Chinese race” will be counted under the Chinese quota regardless of where they reside.

1948: Displaced Persons Act. Entry is allowed for 400,000 persons displaced by World War II. However, such refugees must pass a security check and have proof of employment and housing that does not threaten U.S. citizens’ jobs and homes.

1950: The Internal Security Act. Enacted over President Truman’s veto, bars admission to any foreigner who might engage in activities “which would be prejudicial to the public interest, or would endanger the welfare or safety of the United States.” It excludes from entry or permits deportation of non-citizens who belong to the U.S. Communist Party.

1952: The McCarran-Walter Act retains the national-origins quota system and “internal security” restrictions, despite Truman’s opposition. For the first time, however, Congress sets aside minimum annual quotas for all countries, opening the door to numerous nationalities previously kept out on racial grounds. Naturalization now requires ability to read and write, as well as speak and understand, English.

1965: The United States finally eliminates racial criteria from its immigration laws. Eastern European countries receive annual quotas up to 20,000, under an overall ceiling of 170,000. Up to 120,000 may emigrate from Western Hemisphere nations, which are still not subject to country quotas (an exception Congress would eliminate in 1976).

1978: World-wide immigration ceiling introduced. A new annual immigration ceiling of 290,000 replaces the separate ceilings for the Eastern and Western Hemispheres.

1980: Refugee Act. A system is developed to handle refugees as a class separate from other immigrants. Under the new law, refugees are defined as those who flee a country because of persecution “on account of race, religion, nationality or political opinion.” The president, in consultation with Congress, is authorized to establish an annual ceiling on the number of refugees who may enter the United States. The president also is allowed to admit any group of refugees in an emergency. At the same time, the annual ceiling on traditional immigration is lowered to 270,000.

1986: The Immigration Reform and Control Act regularizes the status of approximately three million undocumented residents. For the first time, the law punishes employers who hire persons who are here without authorization. The aim of employer sanctions is to make it difficult for the undocumented to find employment. The law has a side effect: employment discrimination against those who look or sound “foreign.”

1990: Immigration Act of 1990. The annual immigration ceiling is further raised to 700,000 for 1992, 1993, and 1994; thereafter, the ceiling will drop to 675,000 a year. Ten thousand permanent resident visas are offered to those immigrants agreeing to invest at least \$1 million in U.S. urban areas or \$500,000 in U.S. rural areas. The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 is amended so that people can no longer be denied admittance to the United States on the basis of their beliefs, statements or associations.

1994: The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is passed by Congress to allow spouses and children of United States citizens or lawful permanent residents (LPR) to self-petition to obtain LPR status. The immigration provisions of VAWA allow certain battered immigrants to file for immigration relief without the abuser’s assistance or knowledge, in order to seek safety and independence from the abuser.

1996: A persistent recession in the U.S. in the early 90s, among other reasons, leads to calls for new restrictions on immigration. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act is passed, toughening border enforcement, closing opportunities for undocumented immigrants to adjust their status, and making it more difficult to gain asylum. The law greatly expands the grounds for deporting even long-time lawful permanent residents. It strips immigrants of many due process rights and their access to the courts. New income requirements are established for sponsors of legal immigrants. In the Personal

Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, Congress makes citizenship a condition of eligibility for public benefits for most immigrants.

1997: A new Congress mitigates some of the overly harsh restrictions passed by the previous Congress. In the Balanced Budget Agreement with the President, some public benefits are restored for some elderly and disabled immigrants who had been receiving them prior to the 1996 changes. With the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act, Congress provides an opportunity for certain war refugees living in legal limbo to become permanent residents.

1998: Congress continues to mitigate some of the harsh provisions passed by the Congress in 1996 by partially restoring access to public benefits for additional groups of legal immigrants. The Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act resolves the legal limbo status of certain Haitian refugees, and allows them to become permanent residents. Responding to the pleas of powerful employer groups, Congress passes the American Competitiveness and Workforce Improvement Act, which significantly raises the number of skilled temporary foreign workers U.S. employers are allowed to bring to the U.S.

2000: Congress continues to move incrementally in a pro-immigrant direction, passing the compromise Legal Immigration Family Equity Act, which creates a narrow window for immigrants with family or employer sponsors to adjust to legal status in the U.S., resolves the legal limbo of certain immigrants denied legalization in the mid-1980s, and provides temporary visas for certain family-sponsored immigrants waiting for their green cards. For the second time in three years, Congress significantly raises the ceiling for skilled temporary workers. The Child Citizenship Act grants automatic U.S. citizenship to foreign-born adopted children. The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act provides visas for trafficking and crime victims. Congress modifies the naturalization law to allow severely disabled immigrants to become citizens even if they cannot understand the Oath of Allegiance.

2001-2004: After the attacks on September 11, 2001, Congress enacts that USA PATRIOT Act, which expands the authority to detain, prosecute and remove foreigners suspected of terrorism. The executive branch issues a series of new regulations and policies targeting non-citizens. Immigration appeals are restricted, detention policies are expanded and the refugee resettlement system is temporarily halted while new security procedures are implemented.

*View an interactive version of this timeline at: [www.welcometheimmigrant.org/timeline](http://www.welcometheimmigrant.org/timeline)*

Sources: Ellis Cose, *A Nation of Strangers: Prejudice, Politics, and the Populating of America* (New York: Morrow, 1992); James Crawford, *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of “English Only”* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992); Roger Daniels, *Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1950* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, 2d ed. (New Brunswick, N J : Rutgers University Press, 1988); Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American Immigration*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); The Close Up Foundation: U.S. Immigration Policy [www.closeup.org](http://www.closeup.org). Chronology originally prepared by James Crawford for the National Immigration Forum, 2003 and used with permission from Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights.

## Testimonies from Congregations

Currently, we have formed a committee to address immigration issues and this group of people is passionately moving forward to find creative ways to participate and educate. We've met with our representatives, written letters to the editor of the *Greensboro News & Record*, met with individuals caught in the issue to listen to their story and consider how we can help, attended marches and are currently working with FaithAction to host the Pilgrimage for Peace and Justice during Holy Week.

Of the many things we've done, by far, the moment that was most transformative for me, was a simple cup of coffee as I listened to a story that broke my heart and made me feel deeply ashamed of our country's systemic illness related to this issue.

Sheila Hoyer, Christian Education Minister  
First Friends Meeting, Greensboro, NC

We have supported a small church that is surrounded by immigrants from Burma and Cambodia to develop some welcoming ministries with that population. Our newest venture is the beginning of a community garden there on church grounds and the hope of developing some relationships with those who will work and keep the garden.

I think these efforts and those with the homeless have indeed changed our congregation. We are more accepting of others and especially see more diversity as the goal for our congregation. I think our experiences with people from other countries make us aware of how Christ wants us to be welcoming to those in transition.

Rev. Bill Jeffries, Senior Associate Pastor  
Providence United Methodist Church, Charlotte, NC

Our congregation sponsored several refugee families - we helped get their apartments ready, welcomed them when they arrived, helped them look for jobs, helped them learn culture and practical things like how to grocery shop here, etc. Some of these refugee families chose to remain a part of our congregation long-term, so we have formed closer relationships with them. We have explored ways to incorporate their language and music into worship services, and involve them in leadership.

We started community gardens on our church grounds, mainly so that these families could have a place to grow food since they lived in apartments. We started English as a Second Language classes at the church. We had members partner with the refugee families to help them learn to fill out paperwork (Medicaid, etc.). These families and many of their friends (who may not be involved in our church) love to play volleyball and our church has a volleyball court, so when the weather is warm there are often immigrants and refugees playing on our church grounds all afternoon and evening.

In addition, several immigrant-led congregations have asked to meet at our church. On Sundays, in addition to our "founding" congregation, there is a church of predominately Filipino immigrants, a church of Indian immigrants, and a church of Vietnamese Montagnard immigrants that all meet in our buildings. A few times a year we all worship together.

It is very exciting for our small congregation to have so much vibrant activity going on at our church campus all the time. It is a busy and lively place! We have learned about other cultures and their traditions, and they have shared their faith with us. When we worship together, it is so meaningful to hear God praised in so many different languages - we have a pretty spectacular World Communion Sunday service. Our members have especially benefited from our deeper relationship with the refugee families who have become a part of our congregation, who help us see things from another perspective. It has been good for us to think about how to be more hospitable and welcoming to people whose life experiences are so different from our "American" members. It has also helped us as a church to find a sense of mission and purpose. We now have incorporated these relationships into our vision for the church's future, because we feel that God is calling us to be a church that ministers across cultures.

Rev. Diane Faires, Associate Minister  
St. Paul's Christian Church, Raleigh, NC

We have hosted gatherings for clergy to listen and discuss issues around immigration. We offer English As Second Language Classes, Spanish Classes, Fellowship (Fiesta) opportunities, tutoring and art classes, and we have taken the lead to promote advocacy and resources for health/human services.

We reach out to our new neighbors because it is what we are called to do as followers of Jesus Christ. We are called to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, and everything we do to include the Hispanic/Latino community reflects that call.

Rev. Linda Taylor, Pastor  
Oleander United Methodist Church, Wilmington, NC

A congregation of recent immigrants and visitors to the U.S., we partnered with Spanish-speaking immigrants to develop a Spanish-speaking congregation by sharing with them our space of worship, education and fellowship. We have offered a Spanish class for our members, created a budget for training the Spanish-speaking lay leadership, and recently participated in a short-term mission to a country in Latin America.

We have done and will continue to do these things and more, because we believe that the church is a welcoming and inclusive community of faith that Jesus Christ called "my Father's house" where there are "many rooms" (John 14:2).

Our cross-cultural encounter and relationship with Spanish-speaking and English-speaking brothers and sisters in Christ has made us proud Koreans and humble Christians as well.

Rev. Gun Ho Lee, Pastor  
Korean Presbyterian Fellowship, Greenville, NC

Our church held a 6-part Sunday morning adult forum entitled "All God's Children" with Virginia Herring, our assistant minister, an immigration attorney, a college professor, economist, and other experts and knowledgeable professionals speaking on various subjects related to immigrants and refugees. In addition, we founded a network of those in the community who work with refugees. Church families have sponsored refugees, tutored, taught and supported refugee families.

We have been involved because our church has a history and continuing interest in supporting immigrants and refugees.

My life has been enriched by getting to know families whose lives are very different from mine. I am much more aware of the many blessings in my life, making it harder to take those blessings for granted. I have learned so much about other cultures, what we have in common and what is different. It makes one realize life in America is unique and special when compared to how most people in the world live.

Marty Halyburton, Parishioner  
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, Greensboro, NC

In the Burlington District the committee on Hispanic Ministries is involved in advocacy and immigration issues as part of its mission. We have invited new immigrants to tell their stories in some of our meetings. We have sponsored "Know your Rights" events so that the new immigrants will know and get educated about their rights. We are also involved with our new neighbors in providing pastoral counseling, ESL classes, childcare, a community garden, and more.

We do this because it's part of the mission of the church. To love our neighbor is not an option. This ministry is reshaping our faith and deepening it. We are educating ourselves; we are aware of what's going on other parts of the world and we are making the connections with our own history and country.

Rev. Rosanna Panizo, United Methodist Burlington District  
Hispanic-Latino Missionary, Burlington, NC

Our church has been involved with an emerging Lutheran ministry called La Vela, which has both a Center for Emotional Health and Wellness, and a new mission congregation. Our congregation has supported both, and we have had several volunteers help with literacy including English tutoring and reading. We have also provided facilities for some of their counseling and programs and events. The interaction with volunteers and other church members has helped with awareness of immigration issues, as well as putting faces with labels and overcoming some stereotypes.

Rev. Jay Hilbinger, Pastor  
First Lutheran Church, Greensboro, NC

In my two previous congregations, I was involved in refugee resettlement and found it to be one of the most life-changing ministries that I've been involved with. There's nothing better than having names and faces with an issue.

Rev. Mark Benson, Senior Minister  
Gordon Street Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),  
Kinston, NC

Our congregation has made at least some small strides in connecting with immigrants. We've had ESL classes on Monday nights for six years and from that we've made some friendships. A number of Latino children attend a Wednesday after-school program for elementary children (tutoring, handbells, children's choir, meal, Bible time, etc.). The ESL instructor and her family joined our congregation and made us aware of both local need and structural realities. Through these ties, we've hosted baby showers, Quinceañeras, and more.

Dr. Jim McCoy, Pastor  
First Baptist Church, Weaverville, NC

Our congregation helped start an outreach to Spanish speaking immigrants in the mid-1990s that became Iglesia Unida. There were multiple reasons. Some people in the congregation could remember immigrant churches in their youth -- growing up speaking German or Norwegian or Hungarian -- and their own families' stories of being immigrants. Others were interested in new church starts. Some had adopted children from Central America and this was a way of giving back. Others were interested in United Church becoming multi-cultural. Some were working with Latino immigrants. Others saw immigration as a justice issue.

Due to the personal relationships that have been created, there is greater understanding of and sensitivity to the concerns of immigrants and their families.

Rev. Richard Edens, Pastor  
United Church of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC

# Get Involved

There are many concrete things that you can do to connect with immigrants and make our communities more welcoming places. Here are some ideas:

## Education

- Order the free in-depth study guide - *For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. through the Lens of Faith* (order form available at [www.welcometheimmigrant.org/study-guide](http://www.welcometheimmigrant.org/study-guide)). This free study guide includes a chapter on immigration in North Carolina.
- Preach a sermon on “Welcoming the Immigrant.”
- Include immigrants in pastoral prayers.
- Teach a Sunday-school class or small group on immigration.
- Host an event on immigration at your congregation or community center.
- Offer a resource table at your congregation or community center on immigration issues.

## Service

- Form a congregational partnership with a local Latino center, immigrant rights group, or other similar organization.
- Attend worship at a congregation with immigrants in your community.
- Host community meals at your congregation that include immigrants, creating a space where all are welcome to share.
- Visit a migrant farmworker camp in your county with members of your congregation.

## Advocacy

- Sign onto the statement by the North Carolina Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants at: [www.welcometheimmigrant.org](http://www.welcometheimmigrant.org).
- Contact national political leaders to express support for comprehensive immigration reform and opposition to enforcement-only measures.
- Write a Letter to the Editor to explain your views on immigration (see [www.welcometheimmigrant.org/lte](http://www.welcometheimmigrant.org/lte) for more info).
- Meet with members of state and local governments to express support for measures including access to higher education, drivers’ licenses, and opposition to anti-immigrant legislation.

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Photo: Chris Liu-Beers

The NC Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants is a growing statewide, faith-based movement committed to welcoming immigrants.

For more information and to sign a statement of support, visit:  
**[www.welcometheimmigrant.org](http://www.welcometheimmigrant.org)**

At the website, you'll also find:

- Tools for engaging congregations
- Current news articles about immigration issues
- Links to more information
- Theological reflections
- Denominational statements
- Interactive guestbook
- List of statement signers
- And much more...

# Becoming the Church Together

Immigration, the Bible, and Our New Neighbors



**North Carolina Council of Churches**

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