

BECOMING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

Immigration in Light of Biblical Faith:
A Study Guide for Wisconsin Congregations



WISCONSIN COUNCIL
OF CHURCHES
COURAGE. JUSTICE. HOLY IMAGINATION.

Becoming Welcoming Communities - Wisconsin Council of Churches- Session 1, Handout 1H

Interview with Michelle Gonzalez

Edited for length and clarity

What were your parents' struggles?

For one, they did not speak the language. They did not have their own place to stay and had to live with relatives for about five years before they were able to move out into their own place. My mom was pregnant with me at the time, and she had to navigate the journey of becoming a mother and a newly wedded woman in a place that was alien to her.

How were their first days?

Their first days were difficult. They were clumsy as they tried to find their place in the city and in the country. They had family already here to help them around, but I remember my mom saying that she felt so strange. She knew everyone around her back home, but in this new city it was completely different. There was this feeling of unfamiliarity.

Do you remember anyone that made it a better adjustment for them? If so, what did this person do for them?

My mom's parents were here, and they took my parents into their home when they arrived. They had only been here about a year when my parents arrived, but it was enough for them to be better situated. More particularly, one of my mother's uncles bought my dad a car and was able to find him a job even before he arrived in the city. That was a huge help.

Questions for reflection:

1. Ms. Gonzalez reflects on her parents' struggle as newlyweds and expectant parents in a new city and country. If you or someone close to you have had the experience of anticipating parenthood, reflect on those days. What did you or your loved one find to be of comfort and support?
2. How were Ms. Gonzalez' parents supported as they began their family?
3. What was most challenging?

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Interview with Nurhayati Ali

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How old were you when you arrived?

I was nine months old when my mom, dad, and I fled to Malaysia due to the dangerous conditions in Myanmar. When I was one and a half years old, my family and I immigrated to the US with refugee status and resettled in Hartland, Wisconsin. A couple years later, we moved to Milwaukee because there was a large Muslim community there.

Was it difficult?

Since I was very young when I came to the US, I don't really recall what my first days were like. However, I know that my parents struggled a lot because they were in a new environment with no relatives, family, or friends. They did not know how to speak English. My mom was a stay-at-home mom and my dad worked several long-hour temp jobs to pay bills and provide for the family.

Did you get help from anyone?

I remember my parents telling me about that. When we first came, there were some people from a resettlement agency that helped us get used to living in America and helped us with anything else that we needed.

Questions for reflection:

1. Like Ms. Gonzalez, Ms. Ali does not remember the journey her family made to the United States but shares the reflections of her parents' experiences. The timeline given shows that about nine months passed between fleeing violence in Myanmar and arriving in Hartland, WI. Although this is a short time by resettlement terms, it is a significant period of time, especially for parents of an infant. How might those nine months have been spent?
2. The family's long adjustment to the culture and later move to Milwaukee shows that the journey does not end upon arrival. What would the family have needed during those first years?
3. What do you think and hope they received after moving closer to a Muslim community in Milwaukee?