

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 2, Handout 2H

Interview with Tha Chin Par

Edited for length and clarity

Tell me about the time you came to the United States.

I was 11 years old when I left my country of Myanmar. I was aware of a few things that were going on, but I was still young, so I do not remember much. We had to stop by Malaysia before being allowed to come to the United States. My first day in the USA was back on November 10, 2010. We arrived at an airport in New York – I don't remember which one. I remembered that it was super cold! We didn't know about the cold weather and we weren't prepared. Luckily, we had a small blanket from the plane, but it was not enough for us to beat the cold weather. I remember shivering. Because Malaysia was hot, we did not expect the cold. Also, I remember feeling grateful and relieved at the same time.

Was there anyone who helped you cope with the hardships you experienced?

Yes, Mrs. Irena (a refugee students' caseworker). This person has helped me in many ways from the first years, when I started 8th grade, through my sophomore year in high school, before we moved to Wisconsin. Thanks to her, I was able to join programs such as art club, after school garden and other programs which helped me improve my social skills and language skills.

She also taught me how to use US currency because I wasn't sure how to use the cash and coins that I had...especially the coins! Thanks to her, I also know how to use navigation maps and get around places.

Questions for reflection:

1. How does Ms. Par's story make you feel? What experiences can you empathize with? What ones are strange to you?
2. What do you suppose were the biggest challenges she faced? Or the most important help she received?
3. What is something that you or your church could do to help someone in a similar situation?

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Interview with Pastor Charlie Nun Uk

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Who did you immigrate with? Why did you immigrate to America? What was your life like after immigrating?

I came with my whole family. My father is a politician who fought for democracy and equal opportunity. But he was under surveillance by the military in Burma (Myanmar). My life went back to the beginning when I got to America. It started from zero.

What was the process like to immigrate? Was it easy? Hard?

If I compare the access to food and clothes, etc. in Burma and America, I would say it is so much easier here. But if you are forced to leave your country and live in another world, it is like ash in the wind. Never easy.

Do you have members of your church who are immigrants? Is it a focus of your church?

Our church is an immigrant church from Burma. One of our church goals is to help immigrant families when they settle in the Milwaukee area.

What do you do in your church to make new members who are immigrants feel welcomed?

Our church staff are required to help immigrant families' needs, such as medical appointments, job searching, transportation, and interpretation.

Does your church have funds to specifically help new members who are immigrants?

We don't set up or put money aside for it, however, if the family needs help to pay rent or something else, we do help them sometimes. Our church also hired one person full time to help new arrivals and whoever else needs help. We are always prepared to help.

Questions for reflection:

1. What do you think life was like for Pastor Nun Uk's family in Burma? If you were in a similar situation, why might you want to leave?
2. What do you think he means by "starting from zero" or "ash in the wind"?
3. Are there things your church could do for immigrants that might be similar to what Pastor Nun Uk's church does?