



WISCONSIN COUNCIL
OF CHURCHES
COURAGE. JUSTICE. HOLY IMAGINATION.

BECOMING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES



Immigration in Light of Biblical Faith (second edition)
A Study Guide for Wisconsin Congregations

LEADER'S GUIDE

BECOMING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

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ABOUT THE WISCONSIN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC) is a network of Christian churches and faith-based organizations committed to working together across our many differences. Exercising holy imagination, we help one another make courageous choices that lead toward peacemaking, social and economic justice for Wisconsin's most vulnerable residents, the vitality of the church, and the well-being of our neighbors. The Council connects 21 Christian traditions, which have within them approximately 2,000 congregations and over one million church members. Join with us as we pray and work together for the unity and renewal of the church and the healing and reconciliation of the world.

Members of the Council as of December 2022:

African Methodist Episcopal Church, American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin, Armenian Orthodox Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of God in Christ, Church of the Brethren, Coptic Church, Ecumenical Catholic Communion, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Greek Orthodox Church, Life Center Madison, Mennonite Church USA, Metropolitan Community Churches, Moravian Church, Orthodox Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the Dioceses of Green Bay and La Crosse sit as observer members. Benedictine Women of Madison, Church Women United, The Collaboration Project, Foundry Spiritual Center, Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee, Interfaith Peace Working Group, Just Dane, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (Region 9), and Race and Faith, Worker Justice Wisconsin are Ecumenical partners.

ABOUT THIS STUDY GUIDE

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Visit our website at wichurches.org for:

- A downloadable copy of this study guide
- All handouts for each of the sessions
- Immigration reform advocacy opportunities
- Links to additional resources



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This is Some of The Story of the Land We Are On

By the time Europeans came to the area we now know as Wisconsin, the early mound building cultures had disappeared from this area, leaving traces of their sacred rituals on the land. The cultures we know are those from the first European incursions into this area. The land our churches and communities are on is Očhéthi Šakówinj (oh-chey-tee shah-koh-WEEN), which means “Seven Council Fires.” It is Menominee, which means “Wild Rice People.” It is Anishinaabe, which means “original person.” The lands and waters are sacred.

The story of the land is also the story of the people. The people of this land are the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Oneida, Menominee, Mohican, Ho-Chunk, and Brothertown. Not all came to this place voluntarily. Some were forced into what we now call Wisconsin. Some were forced across it. Some were forced out of it and found ways to return.

Wisconsin’s native languages are many. Some are extinct. Some have survived. Some are being carefully nurtured and taught that they might live to share sacred stories and everyday life with future generations.

We need to know the stories of this land and its people. We need to know how beginning in 1804 land was relinquished by tribal nations in treaties whose terms were unfair and not upheld; and how land was also taken by force. Settler colonizers representing the government carried out genocide, ethnic cleansing, and forced removal. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was used to enable many atrocities. The land taken was divided and used for military purposes, or commerce, or for white settlers. The First Nations lost water rights and access to their homes, the places where their ancestors lived and rested. The legal, financial, and social consequences of these removals continue.

The church was not innocent in this work. Empowered by Christian tradition, we have entangled ourselves with the work of empire, sending missionaries, some of whom coerced conversion and disrespected the personhood of those they encountered. Some Christian traditions gained a foothold here in Wisconsin because of the forced relocation of Native peoples who had already converted to Christianity.

Many of the member traditions of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, and their predecessors, supported the system of residential schools which systematically stripped American Indian children of family, culture, and language, in an attempt to integrate them into whiteness. These schools were sources of death and destruction, and created generational trauma for families whose children were sent there. This is not a long-ago history. Its effects continue to this day. Some of the survivors of these schools are still among us.

Despite the harm we have wrought, the First Nations of Wisconsin are still here. Some are part of the church. Some practice traditional ways. They nurture the land and water, participate in their communities, contribute to the well-being of the state and their Nations, and celebrate the ongoing gift of life as part of the human family.

We confess this truth and claim these commitments: Our ability to gather, worship, learn, and establish our presence as a church came at great expense to the original inhabitants of this land. We recognize their descendants. We honor their resilience. We commit to concrete actions that will begin to restore the distorted relationships between us. We owe attention, time, relationship and resources to those from whom we have stolen so much.

Please join us.

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Introduction

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

We easily forget how mobile people have been throughout history, but we only have to recall familiar Bible stories to bring that lesson home. From the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, through God's call to Abraham and Sarah to leave their homeland, through the Exodus from Egypt and the Babylonian Exile, to Paul's journeys among the cities of the Mediterranean, Scripture tells us of God's people on the move.

The history of the church echoes that Biblical story of people on the move, propelled by the actions of empires. Christians traveled and made homes throughout the Roman Empire. They carried the story of Jesus outside the empire's boundaries, to Ethiopia, India, Russia, and the northern territories of the Germanic tribes. As Christianity became intertwined with the work of empires and their spread, our story grew more complex. Motivated by religious decrees, colonizers brought the Christian faith with them across the globe to new places including America, claiming territory, removing resources, and changing indigenous cultures forever.

Despite aspirational "melting pot" statements and sporadic movements of sanctuary and welcome, hospitality and justice have not been our country's characteristic stance toward those who do not match the dominant Euro-American group. Enslaved persons were brought here from Africa by force and exploited as unpaid labor. The original inhabitants were forced from their homes, their lands stolen by European colonizers. Government policies enabled atrocities that amounted to ethnic cleansing and genocide in many places. Racist laws restricted immigration from certain countries and regions. Throughout the history of the United States, newer immigrants have faced, and continue to face, discrimination from those whose families had arrived earlier.

Peoples are regularly forced into motion for reasons of faith – often by a mismatch between their faith and others'. As they go, they bring traditions with them, and when their traditions seem strange to those among whom they settle, it can make them feel unwelcome. As people move from place to place, they often find themselves to be (in Moses' words), "strangers in a strange land." Some strangers eventually become recognized as "neighbors" while others do not – often because of the color of their skin.

We know how unsettled and anxious we can become on unfamiliar turf, among unfamiliar people. Will we be welcomed or shunned? Helped to find our way around or criticized for every misstep? And so we are called to respond to the stranger among us. It is not surprising that hospitality and justice for the "resident immigrants" are key themes in the Bible. "Don't neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it." (Hebrews 13:2) These virtues reflect God's own gracious hospitality and love for all people as well as God's special concern for the vulnerable.

We can and must learn to do better. Hospitality and justice are important words for us today as we encounter new neighbors who are immigrants and refugees from Latin America, Africa, Asia, Oceania, Europe, and the Middle East. The question we are invited to ask is not, "Who are they?" but "Who are we?" Are we welcoming people, welcoming churches, welcoming communities? Do we reflect God's gracious hospitality, love, and justice for everyone, delighting in, "who they are" and "where they are from?"



About this Study Guide

Becoming Welcoming Communities is designed to help congregations respond to immigrants and immigration in light of Biblical faith. The curriculum in this book includes lesson plans for six 45-minute study sessions that weave together Wisconsin history, Bible passages, personal stories, information on immigration policies, and suggestions on how to take action to support today's refugees and immigrants.

These sessions can be organized in any of several formats. For example:

- A series of six Sunday morning adult forums
- A series of three two-hour evening educational events
- A full day or two half-day weekend retreats
- An ecumenical study and discussion with other congregations in your area
- A retreat for your church council or social witness committee
- A community series discussing key issues in upcoming state and national elections
- A regional forum for your denomination or tradition
- A sermon series based on the topics of the lessons

Because the guide can be downloaded in Word as well as PDF format, you can abridge, rearrange, or supplement the materials to fit your needs or goals. For example, you can:

- Condense or expand sessions for a four- or seven- (or more) week class
- Create, by cutting and pasting, separate sessions on Bible and theology, history of immigration, immigrant stories, how churches can meet immediate needs, or advocacy
- If your church has already used the first edition, select materials to create a refresher course with new materials for further study, discussion and action
- Incorporate immigrant interviews as in-class discussion materials instead of homework handouts, or pull out class exercises for participants to do on their own between sessions, with or without follow-up discussion in the next session
- Incorporate study and discussion materials from your denomination or an organization that advocates for immigrants
- Add materials from the [Further Resources](#) page (see below), your own reading or research, stories from local news media, or interviews with persons in your community who have experience with immigration
- If you are only using some of the sessions (or if there is a lot of turnover in participants), you may want to repeat the opening statement about the theme of the course in every session



ABOUT THE BIBLE TRANSLATION USED IN THIS STUDY GUIDE

The translations used in this study guide and the handouts are from the Common English Bible, which uses “immigrants” where other translations use “aliens,” “strangers,” “sojourners” or other terms. This helps to underscore the relevance of these biblical texts to present-day concerns. In Session 3, participants will have a chance to reflect on the differences between translations. If you want to discuss contrasting wording in other passages, you can also supply Bibles in different translations or invite participants to bring their own.

Resources for Prayer and Worship

We recommend opening and closing each session with an appropriate prayer. Below are examples, but you can also write your own, invite prayers from participants, or use one from other sources. See the [Worship Resources](#) page on the *Becoming Welcoming Communities* section of the WCC website for texts you can use in worship or adapt as opening or closing prayers for the class.

God of welcome, send us with a spirit of welcome. You call us to welcome the stranger and love our neighbor. As we learn together, give us the wisdom to discern the ways we can live out this call. Let us be the radical welcome, inspired by your Word, your life, and your Spirit. Amen.

God of every journey, grant us generous spirits eager to welcome newcomers. Give us eyes to see all strangers as your beloved children and our friends and neighbors. Help us alleviate their burdens and build stable communities. Make for all your children homes free from violence and cruelty. And forever lead us in your way of justice and peace.

God of every journey, grant us generous spirits eager to relieve the suffering of people forced to flee from their homes. Shelter every refugee with protection from danger. Strengthen them for all the trials that lie ahead. Sustain them with nourishing food and clean water along the way. Make for all your children homes free from violence and cruelty. And forever lead us in your way of justice and peace.



ACTION ITEMS

Session Six, “Taking Action In Our Community” includes a handout with ideas of ways your congregation can take action toward becoming an immigrant-welcoming community. If you wish, you can distribute that handout at the beginning of the course for participants to keep in mind how they might take action on what they are learning. Also, you might want to keep track of action ideas that occur to participants during the earlier sessions, to inform your planning exercise at the end.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The [Becoming Welcoming Communities](#) section of the Wisconsin Council of Churches website has Word and PDF downloadable versions of this study resource, all of the handouts referred to in each of the six sessions, publicity materials, worship resources on immigration, the “Immigration Stories” video, and more. Please check out these resources as you prepare to publicize and present your class.

A [Further Resources](#) page in the section has links to websites and organizations with more information about immigration that you might find helpful in preparing for your sessions or in answering questions that may come up. In addition, there are many immigration-related topics that are not covered in this study guide, such as the bringing of enslaved persons to America; the displacement and genocide of the continent’s original inhabitants; the escalating crisis of refugees due to human disruption of the climate; and others. If you wish to plan additional sessions to explore other topics, the [Further Resources](#) page includes some suggestions for research.

NOTE: This edition of the study guide is intended to be a living document, with new resources, supplements, and sessions being added from time to time. Follow WCC communications and revisit the website to see if there is anything new.

Preparing for the Class

Be sure to carefully read through the complete study guide before beginning your preparations. Think about whether and how you might want to modify, expand, or shorten the lesson plans as suggested above to fit the needs of your class and congregation.

STEP 1: FIND PEOPLE WILLING TO SERVE AS ORGANIZERS, FACILITATORS, OR RESOURCE PERSONS

This study will work best with a group of people willing to organize the study, find space, set times, and all of the other tasks that accompany this type of teaching and learning. Recruiting one or two people willing to facilitate will also be helpful.

Find someone in your congregation or community who is knowledgeable about the issue and who can come to the class to help lead the discussion, answer questions and provide background. However, don't let any person—even an expert—dominate the discussion.

Respectfully invite recent immigrants who live in your area to share their own stories, but don't be surprised or offended if recent immigrants are hesitant about sharing their stories publicly. The experience of leaving a place thought of as home and having to settle in a new and strange place can leave persons with feelings of vulnerability, trauma, and grief.

STEP 2: DECIDE IF YOU WILL OFFER THE COURSE IN-PERSON OR ONLINE.

Offering the course online has advantages and disadvantages. In-person gatherings have the warmth and informality of face-to-face social interaction, and avoid many of the frustrations that come with complex technology. Online classes can provide a safe way to meet during pandemics or times of uncertainty about weather, save attendees' travel time, offer an easier way to share audiovisual media, enable remote participation, and be more accessible for those who have parenting needs or certain disabilities.

IF YOU HOLD THE CLASS ONLINE:

- Review the study guide to check for exercises that may be difficult or impossible to do online, or that need to be adapted in some way
- In addition to the facilitator, have someone to provide technical support – monitoring the chat, troubleshooting participants' connection problems, managing videos, spotlighting speakers, sharing screens, etc., if those will be used
- Make sure the facilitator has a good connection, is well-lit, and their camera is appropriately placed
- At the beginning of the first session, instruct the participants on muting themselves when not speaking, using the chat function, etc.
- Plan to share the video, "Immigration Stories" that can be found on the study guide resources page on the WCC website, and check for any other resources, such as charts and slides, developed for the course (When you share video, make sure you share sound)



IF YOU HOLD THE CLASS IN-PERSON:

- Put up appropriate maps, charts, posters, photographs, artwork or news articles in the classroom
- Offer simple refreshments, or have the class gather for a meal – perhaps of food reflecting an immigrant heritage
- Have a small display of objects brought to the United States by immigrants and their families
- Include appropriate liturgical items or religious symbols or pictures to reinforce the idea that the discussion is taking place within a faith framework

STEP 3: ADVERTISE. ADVERTISE. ADVERTISE!

To ensure good participation, ask those responsible for online and print bulletins and newsletters to publicize the class well ahead of time in as many ways as possible, both in your congregation and in your community. (See the *Becoming Welcoming Communities* web page for publicity materials.)

- Put up flyers for the class in your church building
- Include articles about the topic in your church newsletter
- Include an insert about the class in Sunday bulletins and weekly e-newsletter messages
- Post the event on your church's social media page or church website
- Create an online form for people to register for the class, and include the link in the publicity. Use the form to collect email addresses so that you can be in contact with participants before, during, and after the class. (Alternatively, you can ask people to provide their email addresses on a signup sheet at each in-person session)
- Include references to refugees and immigrants during worship, in the prayers and sermons. Some are available on the [Worship Resources](#) web page. You can also check your denominational resources.
- Advertise the class in your community's newspaper
- Put up flyers around town, in local businesses like grocery stores
- If it will be an ecumenical study event, distribute flyers and online promotional materials to other churches in your community
- Personally invite your friends and neighbors, and also individuals you may not know as well who might have a special interest in the discussion, or who can contribute to it from their own experience with immigration
- Bulletin Board - A few weeks before the class starts, find space in your congregation for a "Becoming Welcoming Communities" bulletin board. Before and during the weeks the class is being held, post advertisements for the class, handouts, announcements and news clippings collected by members of the class. This will help advertise the class, inform other members of the congregation and visitors about the issue and related community events, and remind and engage class members in the issue before the class or between sessions
- Do the same using your congregation's website, facebook page, or other social media
- Share the video of stories from immigrants on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram



STEP 4: LEARN MORE ABOUT IMMIGRATION BEFORE THE FIRST SESSION

The people organizing and facilitating the discussion can help make the experience richer by familiarizing themselves with the issue by reading this guide and checking out the additional resources on the WCC website (see above), but no one helping to organize or lead the discussion should feel they have to be experts to be successful. The *Becoming Welcoming Communities* [Further Resources](#) page includes a helpful glossary of some immigration terminology, especially that used in legal or policy contexts.

If you would like help organizing this discussion, need recommendations about a facilitator, or would like to have some intentional conversations with WCC staff as a part of your process of figuring out what works best for your community, call us at 608-837-3108 or email us at wcoc@wichurches.org.

STEP 5: ESTABLISH GROUND RULES FOR THE DISCUSSION

To help make sure the discussions are constructive and useful, organizers/facilitators need to communicate and be prepared to enforce rules that will promote mutual respect and understanding, such as the following:

1. Everyone gets to talk; don't allow one or two individuals to dominate the discussion.
2. Stick to the subject at hand; avoid getting off on tangents.
3. Listen carefully without commenting or interrupting.
4. Listen charitably; assume that the speaker's intentions are positive.
5. If you disagree, do so respectfully.
6. Ask questions only to clarify. Respect anyone's reluctance to talk openly about things that are personal and perhaps difficult to talk about.
7. Speak for yourself; don't put your words in other people's mouths.
8. Anyone can feel free to pass at any time; it's okay to listen and learn.
9. Practice confidentiality; other people's personal stories are not to be shared elsewhere unless the teller gives permission.
10. "When the going gets rough, turn to wonder."¹ If you feel judgmental or defensive, start wondering instead. "I wonder why I feel this way?" "I wonder what brought them to that belief?"



STEP 6: LET US KNOW HOW IT WORKS!

After the last session, please complete the online evaluation form, and share the link with the participants in a follow-up email:

bit.ly/BWCstudy

¹ [Courage & Renewal Touchstones for Creating Trustworthy Space](#) | [Center for Courage & Renewal \(couragerenewal.org\)](#) We learned this from our friends at the Center for Courage & Renewal and have used it in other study/action processes on challenging topics. We highly recommend it!

SESSION 1

SOJOURN TO THE PROMISED LAND

SESSION 1 GOALS: PARTICIPANTS WILL

1. Recognize that migration has always been part of human history, including Wisconsin's history.
2. Understand "becoming welcoming communities" as a biblical concept and a framework for thinking about immigration issues.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Handout: "Bible Passages for Session 1"
2. Handout: "Immigrants in Wisconsin in the 1800s"
3. Handout: "20th Century Immigration Patterns in Wisconsin" (homework for Session 2)
4. Optional: World map on corkboard and two different colors of map pins. Online class alternative – use a service like Google Maps².
5. Optional Handout: Michelle Gonzalez/Nurhayati Ali interviews



■ INTRODUCTION – 5 MINUTES

Open the session with a prayer.

Introduce the theme of the course by reading aloud the following:

In our mobile world, many people find themselves moving to new neighborhoods, or being joined in their communities by new neighbors. In this course we will explore how we, as Christians, should respond to this reality in our time and place. What does it mean to welcome or be welcomed? How can our churches show God's love to strangers and newcomers? What does it mean to be a welcoming community?

Introductions of the participants:

1. In what communities, states, or countries have you lived in the course of your life? (Optional: have the participants put pins of one of the colors in the map to mark some or all of these places. If someone has lived in many places, have them mark two or three of the most significant.)
2. Did you grow up in the same place where your parents were born?

² <https://www.google.com/maps/about/mymaps/>

Introduce the Bible study by reading the following aloud:

The history of almost any settled place on earth tells of the comings and goings of different groups of people. These people may have been in search of opportunities offered by new land for farming or by jobs in growing cities. They may have left their familiar homes and kindred to escape political turmoil, population pressure, economic changes, invading armies, religious persecution, or famines. Others were torn from their communities to be enslaved in a different country, or violently forced from their homeland by colonizers, as were the ancestors of Black and indigenous people of our own nation.

The Bible is full of stories of relocation and migration – from Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden; through the Exodus of the Hebrews out of Egypt into and into the Promised Land; to the exile and captivity of Israelites in the Babylonian empire; to St. Paul's journeys among the newly-formed Christian communities around the Mediterranean Sea.

One of the classic Biblical stories of migration is that of Abraham, the spiritual ancestor common to Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 12:1-6 aloud:

The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your land, your family, and your father's household for the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation and will bless you. I will make your name respected, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,
those who curse you I will curse;
all the families of the earth he
will be blessed because of you."

Abram left just as the Lord told him, and Lot went with him. Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all of their possessions, and those who became members of their household in Haran; and they set out for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, Abram traveled through the land as far as the sacred place at Shechem, at the oak of Moreh. The Canaanites lived in the land at that time.

Ask the class to discuss:

1. What did Abram hope to gain by going to another country?
2. What did Abram lose by going?

Ask someone to read Genesis 12:10-20 aloud:

When a famine struck the land, Abram went down toward Egypt to live as an immigrant since the famine was so severe in the land. Just before he arrived in Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know you are a good-looking woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife,’ and they will kill me but let you live. So tell them you are my sister so that they will treat me well for your sake, and I will survive because of you.”

When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw how beautiful his wife was. When Pharaoh’s princes saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s household. Things went well for Abram because of her: he acquired flocks, cattle, male donkeys, men servants, women servants, female donkeys, and camels. Then the Lord struck Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues because of Abram’s wife Sarai.

So Pharaoh summoned Abram and said, “What’s this you’ve done to me? Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She’s my sister,’ so that I made her my wife? Now, here’s your wife. Take her and go!” Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning Abram, and they expelled him with his wife and everything he had.

Ask the class to discuss their responses to the following questions:

1. Why did Abram and Sarai go to Egypt? What were the benefits of going to Egypt?
2. What did Abram fear about going to Egypt? How did Abram try to protect himself? How did this work out for him?

Wrap up the discussion by making the following observations:

People who have chosen to leave their homelands throughout history may not have done so for exactly the same reasons that Abram did. They may not have faced the same problems in their new countries. Still, their stories may be like Abram’s in some ways.

Hardships “pushed” them out of their home places. Visions of a new life “pulled” them to other lands. The new country was a mixed blessing, offering both opportunities and dangers. New circumstances called for new coping skills and strategies, some better than others. The people among whom the migrants settled might welcome them or see them as a problem.

And just as God’s purpose was to bless all nations through Abram, so God also has blessed the world through the gifts that people have brought to the lands and communities where they have settled.



■ HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION IN WISCONSIN: THE 19TH CENTURY – 15 MINUTES

Ask the class to discuss:

1. Where did your immigrant ancestors come from? How long ago? Where did they settle on first coming to this land? (Optional: have the participants put one or more pins of the other color in the map to mark some or all of these places.)
2. Do you have or remember any objects that they brought with them from the “Old Country” or that represent your family’s roots? What do these objects mean to your family?
3. What examples can you give of foods, objects, clothing, entertainment, etc. that are part of your life that originated in a country or culture different from that of your ancestors?
4. What do you know about the original indigenous inhabitants of the place where you now live? How could you find out more?

Distribute the handout, “Immigration in Wisconsin in the 1800s.” Ask the participants to take turns reading the handout, one paragraph at a time, in “round robin” fashion. (Volunteers only – give permission to pass.)

Ask the class to discuss:

1. What traces or evidence of this past do you see in Wisconsin today?
2. During this period, immigration was not regulated, except for the exclusion of certain “undesirable” groups, and immigration was actively encouraged. How do you think these policies helped or hurt the development of Wisconsin as a whole?
3. Why do you think Wisconsin passed the Bennet Law? Do you think it was justified?
4. Why do you think the Bennett Law provoked such a strong response? Do you think this response was justified?

■ CLASS DISCUSSION: BEING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES – 10 MINUTES

Ask one of the participants to read **Genesis 18:1-8** and encourage the others to follow along:

The Lord appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he sat at the entrance of his tent in the day's heat. He looked up and suddenly saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from his tent entrance to greet them and bowed deeply. He said, "Sirs, if you would be so kind, don't just pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought so you may wash your feet and refresh yourselves under the tree. Let me offer you a little bread so you will feel stronger, and after that you may leave your servant and go on your way—since you have visited your servant."

They responded, "Fine. Do just as you have said."

So Abraham hurried to Sarah at his tent and said, "Hurry! Knead three seahs of the finest flour and make some baked goods!" Abraham ran to the cattle, took a healthy young calf, and gave it to a young servant, who prepared it quickly. Then Abraham took butter, milk, and the calf that had been prepared, put the food in front of them, and stood under the tree near them as they ate.

Ask the class:

1. Abraham's hospitality to strangers was in accordance with the customs of the ancient Near East. Why do you think this was such an important custom in that time and place?
2. Is hospitality to strangers still an important practice? Is hospitality something to be practiced only by individuals or by communities as well?
3. What would a hospitable, welcoming community be like for the one who is welcomed?
4. What would a hospitable, welcoming community be like for the established members of the community?
5. "A welcoming community is one where strangers become neighbors." Do you agree? How does this happen? What is the difference between hospitality to strangers and "loving your neighbor" – or is there any difference?

■ CONCLUSION

Distribute "**20th Century Immigration Patterns in Wisconsin**" for participants to read for next time.

Ask participants to carry their proof of citizenship with them every day as part of their routine, and bring it to the next session. (see the **IRS I-9 form's list of acceptable documents**) Be aware that this may be a sensitive matter for any noncitizens who may be in the class.

Optional: Distribute the Michelle Gonzalez/ Nurhayati Ali interviews to participants for reading and reflection outside of class.

Thank the class for coming, and close with a brief prayer.

SESSION 2

PRACTICING HOSPITALITY

GOALS: PARTICIPANTS WILL

1. Discover the biblical roots of the practice of hospitality.
2. Consider the challenges faced by immigrants to Wisconsin in the 20th century.

BEFORE THE CLASS:

Download and read the article, "Hospitality, A Practice and a Way of Life"

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Handout: "Bible Passages for Session 2"
2. Handout: "20th Century Immigrations Patterns in Wisconsin"
3. Handout: True-False Quiz
4. Handout: "One Girl's Story"
5. Large writing board or easel pad and felt markers
6. Optional Handout: Tha Chin Par/Pastor Charlie Nun Uk interviews



■ INTRODUCTION – 5 MINUTES

Welcome the class and offer a brief opening prayer.

Review the theme of the course (optional):

In our mobile world, many people find themselves moving to new neighborhoods, or being joined in their communities by new neighbors. In this course we will explore how we, as Christians, should respond to this reality in our time and place. What does it mean to welcome or be welcomed? How can our churches show God's love to strangers and newcomers? What does it mean to be a welcoming community?

Have the participants introduce themselves to each other.

If participants have carried their proof of citizenship with them on their daily routines or brought it to the class, ask: "How does it feel to be asked to prove that you are a citizen? How would it feel to have to be prepared to prove you have a legal right to work, to shop, to walk your dog, to use the health care system, or to have a party at your house or apartment?" (Be aware that this may be a sensitive issue for any noncitizens who may be in the class.)

Introduce the Bible study by reading aloud the following:

We're going to take a look at a story from the Book of Exodus which reveals the social circumstances of Moses as he is formed as a young adult. It's really the story of an immigrant—Moses—who is forced to leave Egypt and travel to Midian in the East. Pay close attention to the story. What was life like for Moses in Egypt? And what was life like for Moses in Midian?

Ask participants to listen to Exodus 2:11-22 while a volunteer reads it aloud:

One day after Moses had become an adult, he went out among his people and he saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. He looked around to make sure no one else was there. Then he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

When Moses went out the next day, he saw two Hebrew men fighting with each other. Moses said to the one who had started the fight, "Why are you abusing your fellow Hebrew?" He replied, "Who made you a boss or judge over us? Are you planning to kill me like you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid when he realized: They obviously know what I did. When Pharaoh heard about it, he tried to kill Moses.

But Moses ran away from Pharaoh and settled down in the land of Midian. One day Moses was sitting by a well. Now there was a Midianite priest who had seven daughters. The daughters came to draw water and fill the troughs so that their father's flock could drink. But some shepherds came along and rudely chased them away. Moses got up, rescued the women, and gave their flock water to drink.

When they went back home to their father Reuel, he asked, "How were you able to come back home so soon today?"

They replied, "An Egyptian man rescued us from a bunch of shepherds. Afterward, he even helped us draw water to let the flock drink." Reuel said to his daughters, "So where is he? Why did you leave this man? Invite him to eat a meal with us." Moses agreed to come and live with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses as his wife. She gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, "because," he said, "I've been an immigrant living in a foreign land."

Post the following questions on a chalk board or easel. Ask participants to gather in groups of 3-4 to discuss the questions:

1. What are the reasons that Moses is in such "hot water" with Pharaoh?
2. What was Moses' experience in his new home, Midian? How was it different from Egypt?
3. Why does Moses self-identify as an "immigrant" at the end of the story?
4. When have you felt like an "outsider"? When has your congregation felt like an "outsider"?

Wrap up the discussion by reading aloud:

Egypt is a powerful empire, where one group of people enjoys wealth and comfort while others are forced to work to support their lifestyle. It is Moses' "home" – but one where he is not "at home," and from which he must flee. Midian is just the opposite of Egypt – a simple, pastoral society, based on sheep herding. Unlike Egypt, there is no forced labor policy in Midian. It is in this "other place" that Moses finds hospitality and, in the end, his true family and home.

Just as the setting of the story changes, so does Moses' own identity. On the one hand, the Hebrew rebukes Moses as another Hebrew, but one who presumes to act like a "boss or judge" over Hebrews – that is, like an Egyptian (v. 14). Later in the story, the daughters in Midian call him "an Egyptian" (v. 19.) At the end of the story, Moses finds he is "an immigrant in a foreign land." (v. 22)

Moses had options and choices throughout the story. The choices he made from his passion for justice made him a fugitive, a refugee, and finally an immigrant. Moses never starts out to be an immigrant, but becomes one, one choice at a time.

■ IMMIGRATION TO WISCONSIN IN THE 1900s - 15 MIN.

Distribute the True-False Quiz, based on the "20th Century Immigration Patterns in Wisconsin" handout that was distributed at the end of class last week (distribute copies right now to those who were not present last week). Ask participants to work in pairs in filling out the quiz for a few minutes. Share responses with the large group. [Answers: 1T, 2T, 3F, 4T, 5T, 6F, 7T, 8T.]

Ask the class, What are the reasons people from foreign lands immigrated to the United States in the 1900s? As individuals call out responses, make a list on the easel pad or writing board.

Distribute the handout, "One Girl's Story." Ask each participant to read a paragraph in a "round-robin" fashion. (Volunteers only – give permission to pass.)

Ask the class:

1. Why did Mai Ya's family and other Southeast Asian refugees come to Wisconsin?
2. Why did the United States accept them as refugees?
3. What challenges did Mai Ya face in adapting to a new way of life?
4. What opportunities and resources did the community provide for her?
5. Many churches sponsored refugee families like Mai Ya's. Do you know of any examples? Why did they take on this responsibility?

In preparation for this final segment of the class, download and read the article “Hospitality, A Practice and a Way of Life” by Christine Pohl.

Post the following on the easel pad or writing board, and read out loud:

For centuries, the church has contrasted
conventional hospitality,
which welcomes family, friends
and influential people, with
Christian hospitality,
which welcomes the vulnerable and the poor into one’s
home and church.
Such hospitality reflects God’s greater hospitality that
welcomes the undeserving,
provides the lonely with a home, and
sets a banquet table for the hungry.

(Note: This arrangement of the text is merely a suggestion – use whatever format will fit the writing space and can be easily read by the class.)

A volunteer can read Matthew 25:35 and Luke 14:12-14 or everyone can read them out loud together:

Matthew 25:35

I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

Luke 14:12-14

Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, “When you host a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected.”

Ask the class:

1. What are the challenges of practicing Christian hospitality?
2. What are the benefits of practicing Christian hospitality?

CONCLUSION

Invite the class to bring bibles (or smartphones or tablets with internet access) to the next class to compare different translations.

Optional:
Distribute the Tha Chin Par/Pastor Charlie Nun Uk interviews for further reading and reflection.

Thank the participants for coming, and close with a brief prayer.

SESSION 3

NEW IMMIGRANTS LIVING AN OLD STORY

GOALS: PARTICIPANTS WILL

1. Empathize with immigrants' motives for coming to the United States, and the hard choices they must make.
2. Identify ways that churches and communities can be welcoming places for immigrants.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Handout: "Bible Passages for Session 3"
2. Bibles - different translations (or have in-class access to Bible Gateway: <https://www.biblegateway.com>)
3. Handout: "Immigration Trends in Wisconsin"
4. Handout: "Immigrants in Wisconsin"
5. Handout: Immigrant profiles for exercise. To prepare:
 - a. Copy each page (2 profiles), one sided, on a different color of paper. If you can't copy on different colored paper, use colored markers to mark each profile with a different color. The different colors will help you hand out the profiles to pairs of class members quickly and easily in such a way that no pair will get two of the same profile.
 - b. Separate the profiles by cutting each sheet on the dotted lines (make enough copies to be sure that there will be a profile for each member of the class).
6. Optional Handout: Yuri interview (part one)



■ INTRODUCTION – 5 MINUTES

Welcome the class and offer a brief opening prayer.

Review the theme of the course (optional):

In our mobile world, many people find themselves moving to new neighborhoods, or being joined in their communities by new neighbors. In this course we will explore how we, as Christians, should respond to this reality in our time and place. What does it mean to welcome or be welcomed? How can our churches show God's love to strangers and newcomers? What does it mean to be a welcoming community?

Invite the members of the class to introduce themselves and answer the question:
What do you value about living in the United States?

Distribute copies of Bibles in different translations or a printout of different translations of Deuteronomy 10:17-19. Or, use the Bible Gateway “Add Parallel” feature to display and compare translations of verse 19 that use words other than “immigrant.”

Introduce the Bible study by reading the following aloud:

There are many passages in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, that talk about how we should treat strangers. The following passage is from Moses’ instructions to the Hebrew people in the wilderness, after God had freed them from slavery in Egypt and given the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, but before they had entered the Promised Land.

Ask participants to turn to Deuteronomy 10:17-19 in their Bibles and ask one person to read the passage aloud from the handout (Common English Bible) while others follow along in different translations:

The Lord your God is the God of all gods and Lord of all lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God who doesn’t play favorites and doesn’t take bribes. He enacts justice for orphans and widows, and he loves immigrants, giving them food and clothing. That means you must also love immigrants because you were immigrants in Egypt.

Ask the class:

1. What words for “immigrant” do other translations use? Does hearing a different word used (stranger, sojourner, resident alien, immigrant, alien, foreigner, outsider) make you understand the passage differently?
2. According to this passage, how are immigrants to be treated?
3. What reasons are given, or implied, for treating immigrants in this way?

Next, read the following:

The letter to the Hebrews is addressed to early Christians in the Roman Empire who have experienced persecution and ridicule from the society in which they lived, and therefore might well be suspicious and fearful of strangers. However, the letter’s readers are urged to welcome fellow Christians from other places, who depend on the hospitality of local Christian communities. “Angel” literally means “messenger” and could mean anyone who brings a message of grace from God.

Ask participants to turn to Hebrews 13:1-3 and have someone read the passage aloud:

Keep loving each other like family. Don’t neglect to open up your homes to guests, because by doing this some have been hosts to angels without knowing it. Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place.

Ask the class:

1. What reasons are given in this passage for showing hospitality to strangers?
2. The command to show hospitality is followed by statements about empathizing with prisoners and persons being tortured – that is, to imagine what it would feel like to be in their situation. Do you see a connection?

■ IMMIGRATION IN WISCONSIN: RECENT AND PROJECTED – 10 MIN.

Distribute the handout, “Recent Immigration in Wisconsin.” Draw participants’ attention to the first graph, “Wisconsin’s Foreign-born Population: 1850-2015,” and ask:

1. How did events and changes in the world and the United States (including but not limited to those listed on the graph) “push” or “pull” immigrants to America (see the table below the chart)? What are the most important “push” and “pull” factors affecting immigration now?

Have participants look at the second graph, “Foreign-born Persons as a Percent of the Total Population of Wisconsin, 1880-2015,” and ask:

2. What is the relative proportion (percent) of immigrants to native-born persons in Wisconsin today, compared to past decades?

Turn to the second handout, “Immigrants in Wisconsin” and have participants skim the information. Ask:

3. What do you think these statistics tell us about the role that recent immigrants play in Wisconsin, and the role their children and grandchildren will be playing in the future?

EXERCISE: WHO ARE IMMIGRANTS TODAY? – 20 MINUTES

We acknowledge the work of the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue for the inspiration for this process and their work together with NETWORK, a Catholic social justice lobby.

DISCUSSION IN PAIRS (10 MIN.)

- Divide the group into pairs. (If there is an even number of class members – not counting yourself – you will sit out the exercise. If there is an odd number, participate in the exercise as a member of a pair.)
- Hand out one profile slip to each class member; be sure that no two members of the same pair receive profiles on the same color paper.

Give instructions:

- *First, one member of your pair reads the immigrant profile they’ve been given to the other member of the pair. Then, the other member asks the first person the questions listed on the right of their slip (the questions are the same for all profiles). The first person answers each question as if they are the person in the profile. Note that some questions may not have clear answers from the information given in the profile – use your imagination or your knowledge of other immigrants’ stories.*

Then reverse the roles, with the other member reading the profile and answering questions. If you are done before the other pairs, wait or talk quietly until I call us back into the full group.

FULL GROUP DISCUSSION (10 MIN.)

After the time for discussion in pairs is over, call everyone back into the full group. Ask the group to discuss:

1. Was there anything particularly surprising, or moving, about the story you read or heard?
2. What ideas has this exercise generated for ways that our church or community could become more welcoming to immigrants and refugees?

■ CONCLUSION

Optional: Distribute the Yuri interview (part one) for further reading and reflection.

Thank the participants for coming and close with a brief prayer.

SESSION 4

REFUGEES AND IMMIGRATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

GOALS: PARTICIPANTS WILL

1. Learn about the recent history of refugee resettlement in the United States.
2. Understand how current immigration laws and racism affect people who immigrate or wish to immigrate to the United States.
3. Realize what it means for much of Wisconsin to be included in the US "border zone."

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Handout: "Bible Passages for Session 4"
2. Handout: "Refugee Resettlement 2000-2022"
3. Handout: "My Immigration Story"
4. Handout: "Border Zone"
5. Handout: "The US. Immigration System" (homework for Session 5)
6. Optional Handout: Yuri Interview (part two)



■ INTRODUCTION – 5 MINUTES

Welcome the class and offer a brief opening prayer.

Review the theme of the course (optional):

In our mobile world, many people find themselves moving to new neighborhoods, or being joined in their communities by new neighbors. In this course we will explore how we, as Christians, should respond to this reality in our time and place. What does it mean to welcome or be welcomed? How can our churches show God's love to strangers and newcomers? What does it mean to be a welcoming community?

Invite the members of the class to introduce themselves to each other.

Introduce the Bible study by reading the following aloud:

Being welcoming means intentionally practicing justice and compassion, both as communities and as individuals. Hospitality has to do not only with how we welcome newly-arrived immigrants and refugees, but also with respecting, valuing, supporting, and caring for everyone who lives in our communities – no matter where they live, where they come from, or what they look like. In the passage we are about to read, Isaiah addresses the descendants of those exiled in Babylon, who have now returned to Judah. The prophet tells them how God expects them to treat one another, while also giving them a message of hope and renewal.

Ask participants to read Isaiah 58:6-12 aloud together:

Isn't this the fast I choose:
 releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke,
 setting free the mistreated,
 and breaking every yoke?
 Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry
 and bringing the homeless poor into your house,
 covering the naked when you see them,
 and not hiding from your own family?
 Then your light will break out like the dawn,
 and you will be healed quickly.
 Your own righteousness will walk before you,
 and the Lord's glory will be your rear guard.
 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
 you will cry for help, and God will say, "I'm here."
 If you remove the yoke from among you,
 the finger-pointing, the wicked speech;
 if you open your heart to the hungry,
 and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted,
 your light will shine in the darkness,
 and your gloom will be like the noon.
 The Lord will guide you continually
 and provide for you, even in parched places.
 He will rescue your bones.
 You will be like a watered garden,
 like a spring of water that won't run dry.
 They will rebuild ancient ruins on your account;
 the foundations of generations past you will restore.
 You will be called Mender of Broken Walls,
 Restorer of Livable Streets.



Ask the class to discuss:

1. Which verses or words stand out to you as we gather to learn more about immigration and refugee resettlement?
2. These prophetic words are a call to social justice, but also a word of hope to those who hear it. How so? As you have learned about immigration and what it means to become a welcoming community, where have you found hope?
3. How do you think the experience of exile and return affected how the people of Judah heard these words? How does knowing about that experience affect our hearing these words?

Introduce this discussion by reading the following:

People who come to the United States from other countries are classified in different ways by US law. Immigrants are those who come seeking to live here permanently. A refugee is someone who is forced to leave their home country due to persecution, war, or violence and cannot safely return. Before receiving legal refugee status, they may be classified as an “asylum seeker.” Until 1980, US law didn’t have a clear process for defining, admitting, and resettling refugees. Since then, refugee policy has become an important and sometimes controversial public issue. Many congregations are deeply involved in refugee resettlement, often working in partnership with federal agencies like the US Office of Refugee Resettlement and faith-based organizations like Catholic Charities, Jewish Social Services, or Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services. To help us understand what it means to be refugee-welcoming communities, we will now read about recent events that have brought refugees to the United States, and how our nation has responded.

Distribute the handout, “Refugee Resettlement 2000-2022.” Ask the participants to take turns reading the handout, one paragraph at a time, in “round robin” fashion. (Volunteers only – give permission to pass.)

Following the reading, ask the class to discuss:

1. How have resettlement numbers changed since the early 2000’s, and why? How have those changes impacted resettlement agencies and Wisconsin’s communities?
2. In what ways did the Afghan evacuation impact refugee resettlement in Wisconsin? What sort of response did you see in your community (or surrounding communities) to the entrance and resettlement of Afghan allies?
3. How is sponsorship different from a cosponsor program of a resettlement agency? What does that mean for churches’ role in refugee resettlement?
4. How do you imagine the United States and Wisconsin will handle refugee resettlement in the future?

■ MY IMMIGRATION STORY - 10 MINUTES

Distribute the handout, “My Immigration Story.” Ask volunteers to read the story by turns, as above.

Invite participants to discuss:

1. What would you do if you needed to run away from your community because it is not safe for you or your child anymore, and you have no money or time to apply to enter the country on a visa or as an asylum seeker or refugee?
2. What would you do if you needed to change your immigration status and didn't have a whole church body to support your family? Would you start working so you could feed your kids and provide them with a home, even if you were not allowed to? Would you drive without a license in an emergency, or in order to meet your family's basic daily needs?
3. When you see a stranger on the street or while shopping, do you find yourself making assumptions about whether they might be an undocumented immigrant based on their ethnicity?
4. When does an immigrant stop being a “stranger” and become a “neighbor” like any other member of the community? Does it depend on their ethnicity – that is, whether they are a white person (even if they still have an accent) or not?

(If any participants did not have a chance to share their own or their family's immigration story, and there is time, you can invite them to do so now.)

■ BORDER ZONE - 5 MINUTES

Distribute the handout “Border Zone.” Invite a participant to read it aloud.

Ask the class to discuss:

1. Did this information surprise you? If so, has it changed your perspective about living in Wisconsin, or about border policy and immigration enforcement?
2. If your congregation falls within the border zone, does that reality affect your mission or call to ministry in any way?

■ CONCLUSION

Distribute the handout: “The US. Immigration System” for participants to read over before the next session.

Optional: Distribute the Yuri interview (part two) for further reading and reflection.

SESSION 5

BECOMING A WELCOMING NATION

GOALS: PARTICIPANTS WILL

1. Identify the values behind biblical laws relating to the treatment of strangers and resident aliens.
2. Identify public policy responses to immigration issues that are consistent with Christian values.
3. Learn how to effectively express views on immigration as persons of faith to legislators and other public officials.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Handout: "Bible Passages for Session 5"
2. Handout: "The US Immigration System"
3. Handout: "Public Policy Advocacy"
4. Optional Handout: Pastor Adam Clausen interview



■ INTRODUCTION – 5 MINUTES

Welcome the class and offer a brief opening prayer.

Review the theme of the course (optional):

In our mobile world, many people find themselves moving to new neighborhoods, or being joined in their communities by new neighbors. In this course we will explore how we, as Christians, should respond to this reality in our time and place. What does it mean to welcome or be welcomed? How can our churches show God's love to strangers and newcomers? What does it mean to be a welcoming community?

Have the participants introduce themselves to each other.

Introduce the Bible study by reading the following aloud:

In earlier sessions we have seen how migration from place to place and community to community is a recurring theme in the Bible. The people of Israel saw God's presence and saving power in their own history of immigration and emigration. We will now listen to a confession of faith that was part of a ritual for offering to God the first fruits of the harvest.

Ask someone in the class to read Deuteronomy 26:5-11:

Then you should solemnly state before the Lord your God: "My father was a starving Aramean. He went down to Egypt, living as an immigrant there with few family members, but that is where he became a great nation, mighty and numerous. The Egyptians treated us terribly, oppressing us and forcing hard labor on us. So we cried out for help to the Lord, our ancestors' God. The Lord heard our call. God saw our misery, our trouble, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with awesome power, and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land—a land full of milk and honey. So now I am bringing the early produce of the fertile ground that you, Lord, have given me."

Set the produce before the Lord your God, bowing down before the Lord your God. Then celebrate all the good things the Lord your God has done for you and your family—each one of you along with the Levites and the immigrants who are among you.

Read the following aloud:

Notice that "the immigrants who are among you" are also to enjoy the bountiful fruits of the land. The people of ancient Israel had a strong sense of their identity as a people called to manifest God's generosity, compassion and justice.

The laws of Israel were meant to express that identity in the ways that they ordered their lives as a community. Time and time again, the prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah called the people to remember who they were and what God expected of them.

According to Deuteronomy 10:19, the people of Israel were to "love the immigrant." How was love expressed in Israel's law? As we listen to the following passages, notice how God's people are expected to treat aliens, foreigners, sojourners and refugees.

Have one or more members of the class read aloud the following passages. Read the explanatory sentence in italics before each passage is read.

Deuteronomy 14:28-29

Deuteronomy contains many of the laws that governed the Jewish people in Old Testament times. Ancient Israel was an agricultural society; each of the twelve tribes was given an allotment of farm land that was passed down from generation to generation— except for the Levites (the tribe from which Israel's priests came). There were also some people who did not own land and so could not raise their own food.

Every third year you must bring the tenth part of your produce from that year and leave it at your city gates. Then the Levites, who have no designated inheritance like you do, along with the immigrants, orphans, and widows who live in your cities, will come and feast until they are full. Do this so that the Lord your God might bless you in everything you do.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15

Poor Israelites and immigrants living in Israel who did not own land often had to work for others in order to survive.

Don't take advantage of poor or needy workers, whether they are fellow Israelites or immigrants who live in your land or your cities. Pay them their salary the same day, before the sun sets, because they are poor, and their very life depends on that pay, and so they don't cry out against you to the Lord. That would make you guilty.

Isaiah 16:3-4a

Isaiah was a prophet who spoke to the people of Judah—the southern portion of Israel that was still free after the northern portion had been conquered by the Assyrian empire. Moab was a neighboring nation that had also been crushed by invading Assyrian armies, and Moabite refugees fled to Judah in search of safety.

Consider carefully, act justly;
at high noon provide your shade like night.
Hide the outcasts;
keep the fugitives hidden.
Let the outcasts of Moab live among you.
Be a hiding place for them from the destroyer.



Ezekiel 47:21-23

Ezekiel was a prophet who spoke to the people of Israel who had been conquered and taken into exile in Babylon, another great empire of the time. In this passage, he looks forward to a time when God will restore the Israelites to their land, which will again be allotted to the twelve tribes.

You will apportion this land among yourselves according to the tribes of Israel. When you distribute the land as an inheritance, the immigrants who reside with you and raise families among you are considered full citizens along with the Israelites. They will receive an inheritance along with you among the tribes of Israel. You will assign the immigrants' inheritance with the tribe with whom they reside. This is what the Lord God says.

Zechariah 7:8-10

Zechariah was yet another prophet who looked forward to Israel's restoration. Here, he reminds the people of the justice that God's law requires of them.

The Lord's word came to Zechariah. The Lord of heavenly forces proclaims: Make just and faithful decisions; show kindness and compassion to each other! Don't oppress the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor; don't plan evil against each other!

Ask the class:

1. What do these passages tell us about how “immigrants” or “strangers” are to be treated?
2. Why do you think “immigrants” are grouped together with the poor, orphans, and widows? (Levites, the tribe of priests in ancient Israel, were the only tribe not allotted land of their own, so they were dependent on the community for support.)

■ DISCUSSION: US IMMIGRATION SYSTEM – 20 MINUTES

Introduce the discussion by reading the following aloud:

The United States in the 21st Century is a very different place than Palestine in the time of ancient Israel or in Jesus’ time. But we, too, have the challenge and opportunity of becoming welcoming communities for new neighbors from other lands – and for some who are not so new, but who have been part of our neighborhoods, schools, businesses, and churches for many years.

We can’t directly apply the customs and laws of the ancient world to our own situation. But we can listen for how God, through Scripture, is calling us to extend compassion and justice to all people, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Distribute “The US Immigration System,” to anyone who does not have a copy from the last session, and continue reading:

The immigration issue is complex as well as controversial. Many people – immigrants and native-born people alike, both citizens and non-citizens – believe that the US immigration system is broken. But they do not always agree on what is wrong or how to fix it.

This handout provides a simplified overview of the immigration system in the United States, the concerns people have about how the system works or fails to work, and some proposals for resolving them. As we review this sheet, be thinking about the values expressed by the biblical passages we’ve just been looking at.

(The handout provides only the briefest overview of the US immigration system, problems with it, and some proposed solutions. The discussion may raise questions about the immigration system that neither you nor other members of the class can answer, but don’t worry: These are opportunities for members of the class to seek out answers and report back, or for inviting an expert to talk in your congregation at a later date. Links to helpful resources can be found on the [Further Resources](#) web page.)

(And, because this issue is controversial and emotionally charged, now would be a good time to briefly review the ground rules for discussion under “Tips for Leading the Course” in the Introduction to this guide.)

Ask the members of the class to spend a few minutes reading the top section of the handout, “Legal Immigration.” Ask the class to discuss:

1. In what ways do you think the current system of **authorized immigration** reflects the values of **compassion** or **empathy** expressed in the biblical passages read earlier? In what ways does it fall short?
2. Which proposed solutions do you think are most consistent with these values?

Ask the members of the class to spend a few minutes reading the second section of the handout, “Undocumented Immigration.” Ask the class to discuss:

1. In what ways do you think the current situation of **undocumented immigrants** reflects or violates the biblical principle of **just treatment** of the most vulnerable?
2. Which proposed solutions do you think are most consistent with the biblical understanding of justice?

Ask the members of the class to spend a few minutes reading the last section of the handout, “Enforcement.” Ask the class to discuss:

1. Do you think that a response to illegal immigration that relies entirely on enforcement can ensure the **well-being of our communities**?
2. What does it mean to say that we are “a society of laws”? Is that necessarily the same thing as being a **just and compassionate society**? Why or why not?

CONCLUSION

Distribute the Handout, “Public Policy Advocacy” and tell the class:

Proverbs 31:8-9 tells us to “Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable. Speak out in order to judge with righteousness and to defend the needy and the poor.” One way that we can do that is by communicating with our legislators, expressing our concern for the well-being of the most vulnerable members of our community and asking them to support public policies that are compassionate, just, and that will strengthen our state and nation as a whole.

On the basis of what you have learned in this course, you may want to speak to your representatives in the state legislature and US Congress on behalf of making our nation and our communities more welcoming to immigrants and refugees. This handout will give you some tips on how to do so.

Optional: Distribute the Pastor Adam Clausen interview for further reading and reflection.

Conclude with an appropriate prayer, and thank the class for their participation.

SESSION 6

TAKING ACTION IN OUR COMMUNITY

GOALS: PARTICIPANTS WILL

1. Move from learning about immigration to taking action to support and welcome immigrants – whether within your congregation or in the wider community.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Sign-up sheets with columns marked “name,” “phone number,” “e-mail,” and “project.”
2. Handout “Taking Action: Today, Tomorrow, Beyond.”
3. A large newsprint pad and stand (use the kind with sheets that can be torn off and stuck to a wall after they are filled out, or post the sheets with removable masking tape), and markers. On one or more of the sheets, write “Resources” and “Partners,” leaving some space to write at the top of the sheet. On one or more additional sheets, write “Next Steps.”
4. Colored adhesive dots, cut into strips of three.
5. Handout: “Public Policy Advocacy”(just a few extra copies, if it was handed out last session) in case advocacy is an action the group decides on.

In advance of this session, you should have some idea of how the awareness and motivation resulting from the preceding sessions can be harnessed for the ideas generated during this session. Is there an existing committee or group that can use additional volunteers to implement these ideas? Does a new task force need to be formed?

Following this session, the next steps may involve convening a new working group or putting items on the agenda of an existing committee, making contacts with others in the congregation or community, and gathering more information. Whether the group can take action right away or needs to do more research, this session should lead to a definite plan to begin the process now.

■ INTRODUCTION – 5 MINUTES

Welcome the class and offer a brief opening prayer.

Review the theme of the course (optional):

In our mobile world, many people find themselves moving to new neighborhoods, or being joined in their communities by new neighbors. In this course we will explore how we, as Christians, should respond to this reality in our time and place. What does it mean to welcome or be welcomed? How can our churches show God’s love to strangers and newcomers? What does it mean to be a welcoming community?

Have the participants introduce themselves to each other.

Tell the group that the purpose of this session is to do some brainstorming about where to go from here. Start the sign-up sheet circulating through the class. Ask the class to write down their names and contact information if they are interested in following through on the action ideas generated in this session, or if they would be willing to help in any way. They should leave the “Project” column blank for now.

Distribute the handout “Taking Action: Today, Tomorrow, Beyond.” Give the class time to read the suggested actions, or read them aloud.



BRAINSTORMING - 15 MINUTES

(Note: If you are doing this online, you can create a poll and simply have the class members vote on their preferred ideas.)

Go around the room and ask participants to say which idea (or two or three) most interests them, and use a word, short phrase, or number from the handout to list those ideas on the newsprint. If anyone repeats an idea, acknowledge it but you don't need to add to the list (there will be an opportunity to vote on ideas later). Class members shouldn't discuss or criticize ideas during this process.

Once everyone has had a chance to suggest an idea from the handout, ask if anyone has other action ideas to suggest, and list those as well. (If you have been recording ideas that class members have brought up in previous sessions, list those on the newsprint before asking for other ideas.)

VOTING - 5 MINUTES

Hand out three adhesive dots to each person and ask them to put the dots next to the ideas that most interest them.

After everyone has voted, circle or underline the idea that received the most votes. If there is a tie, choose one idea and say that you'll come back to the other(s) later in the session or in another planning session.

(If the group chooses public policy advocacy as a priority action, remind them of the handout from last session, and hand out the extra copies to anyone who didn't get it then.)

RESOURCES AND PARTNERS - 10 MINUTES

Write the idea at the top of a sheet above "Partners" and "Resources." Ask, "Who are potential partners in our congregation or our community? Are there particular resources we need for this project?" Write down participants' suggestions under the appropriate heading. If no one has particular suggestions, ask "How might we find out?"

NEXT STEPS - 10 MINUTES

Ask participants to come up with ideas for next steps to carry out the project. Write those on the sheet labeled "Next Steps."

Ask if anyone who hasn't signed the volunteer sheet would like to add their name now. Ask those who signed the volunteer sheet which of the priority "next steps" they would like to work on, and note that in the "project" column.

If there are other ideas that received a significant number of votes and there is enough time, you can repeat the process. If not, ask if there is interest in scheduling another session to work on the additional idea(s).

If advocacy is among the priority actions, refer to the "Public Policy Advocacy" handout from Session 5.

CONCLUSION

How you wrap up depends on the structure for moving these ideas forward. If there is an existing group to take on these tasks, then you can tell the group that you will forward the ideas and the list of volunteers to the committee. If a new task force needs to be formed, then the volunteers will need to set up a first meeting to develop an action plan.

Whatever the case, let everyone know that the conclusion of this study/action series is the beginning, not the end. Encourage everyone to act on what they've learned. Thank them for coming to the class: their interest and participation has set the stage for the initiatives that will follow.

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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