



**BECOMING AN
IMMIGRANT WELCOMING
CONGREGATION**

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation



The Journey is Made by Walking

The United Church of Christ has a long history of working in the fields of justice. One of our strongest justice endeavors has been standing with our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender sisters and brothers and advocating their full inclusion in church and society through the Open and Affirming process. The Open and Affirming process is an experience that is filled with education, breaking down stereo-types and getting to know, through face to face encounters, the struggles and suffering of our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. The Open and Affirming process has transformed many members and churches and has helped them connect and be engaged in a real justice issue of our day.

Somewhere along the way of walking toward justice the church and its people have also found other areas where church and society needs to broaden the circle of inclusion. Immigration is one of those areas that have cried out to members and churches to get involved. In the early 1990's with the abrupt change from a National economy to a Global Economy, communities across the country began to experience a wave of immigration that has challenged the U.S. Society and left many with questions and concerns. Some congregations began to study the issue of immigration and learned of root causes, they studied the impact of the Global Economy and Free Trade.

Agreements, as well as learned about immigrant communities that were present in their cities and towns. Some of these congregations were led to offer direct service while others found different ways to be engaged and involved in the immigrant justice movement. It is amazing how walls and barriers are broken down when people meet face to face, when people become educated, and start looking for solutions.

It was through the endeavors of UCC local congregations and interfaith partners to welcome and organize alongside impacted immigrant members of our communities that the Immigrant Welcoming Congregation model was born.

The church has an important role in the immigration discussion. Our faith tradition and sacred texts are saturated with stories about immigrants. We have a special ability and calling to reach out and love the neighbor---all of our neighbors. But it takes education, face to face encounters, and an effort to engage the sensibilities of our faith. Churches and communities have been asking for a process much like the Open and Affirming process that would carefully help them study, engage, and encounter immigrants and the issues that they face. Ultimately the road to immigration reform at a legislative level will demand the broader education of congregations and communities across the country. Our goal with this study is to help your church be-come an "Immigrant Welcoming Congregation" that can be in solidarity with the immigrant issues in your community.

Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation:

The Journey toward becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation involves multiple study and reflection sessions.

The issue of immigration has become one that defines what kind of society we will become and whether the politics of xenophobia and fear will succeed. Developing a reservoir of resources and knowledge for a congregation to make an informed decision takes thoughtful and diligent work. It is best to keep everyone engaged in the process and part of the dialogue. Church Councils, Boards of Directors and administrative bodies should be encouraged to attend the gatherings as should the youth and young adults. The programs should be aimed at the entire congregation rather than focusing just on a mission or outreach board. At the end of the process it is hoped that the congregation will affirm an “Immigrant Welcoming Congregation” statement that has been written by the congregation. To get to that point it is best to do the ground work and get as many people involved in the education process. As with the Open and Affirming process, it is important to develop a thorough process and then trust the people and the process—once people are engaged and educated things begin to fall into place. Here is a list of possible themes and study sessions.

We invite you to exploration and discernment. It is our conviction that each community which challenges itself to embrace the *Immigrant Welcoming* process is a community open to the dialogue God initiates within our current time and context. We also recognize that in each community, the nature of this dialogue will reflect that community’s unique relationship with God. For this reason, we do not present a one-size-fits-all process. We do not dictate what becoming *Immigrant Welcoming* looks like. Instead, we offer this document as a menu of activities, resources and suggestions which inform what the process *might look like* for your community.

Lastly, we offer ourselves as partners to your congregation as you engage in this discernment. This is our ministry. This is where we see our calling. We are open to learning and teaching, advising and listening, accompanying and cheering your community along on its journey towards affirming itself as *Immigrant Welcoming*. Our prayer is that on this journey we come to a greater understanding of that very abundance of life that we find together in Jesus.

The journey to solidarity can only happen by walking together with our sisters and brothers. Feel free to take these materials and ideas to build your congregation’s own process of becoming an “Immigrant Welcoming Congregation.” Remember to be creative, flexible and engaged. This toolkit has been formed with from the input of congregations doing this work on the ground.

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1. Learning About Our Faith

We live in a world of people on the move. According to the United Nations, there are over 67 million forcibly displaced people in the world. The Bible is full of stories about God's people being forced to leave their countries, Adam and Eve, Noah, Sarah and Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Naomi, Esther, Jeremiah, Jesus, Mary and Joseph to name some. We, in the United Church of Christ find our grounding in God's Word about how we are to treat the stranger in our midst. We, in the UCC, believe we are called to offer an "extravagant welcome." Below are some resources to deepen your understanding of God's call to us.

- Biblical References to Immigrants and Refugees
http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration_worship_biblical-references-to
- Interfaith Scriptures on Immigration
http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration_worship_interfaith-scriptures
- *Faith and Immigration* (with Reflection Questions): A theological exploration of immigration and overview of the UCC's General Synod's thinking on this issue.
http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration_worship_faith-and-immigration
- Theological Reflections on Immigration by **Daniel G. Groody, C.S.C.** including:
 1. Dying to Live: Theology, Migration and the Human Journey
 2. Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees
 3. Dying to Live: Theology, Migration, and the Human Journey
 4. *Strangers in the Land*, a 6 week Bible study dealing with immigration issues, developed by Sojourner Magazine. <http://www.faithandimmigration.org/resources/strangers-land>

2. Building Relationships through Face to Face Encounters with Impacted leaders

Relationship building is part of our calling as Christians. It is a cornerstone of our journey with God. It is in the encounter with others that we meet God more fully. When you get to know people through face to face encounters and hear their struggles, relationships are cemented. As we meet, encounter and grow in our relationships with the immigrants in our community, state, and country, we can build a movement for justice together with our immigrant brothers and sisters regardless of their immigration status.

There are several ways to get to know your immigrant neighbors. One way is through visiting the religious communities where they worship. Attending a local function sponsored by immigrants in the area is a good way to begin to learn about their culture and become supportive of them. A third way to encounter and support our immigrant brothers and sisters is by working together on immigrant justice.

3. Learn About Root Cause for Migration

Our media does not provide a deep analysis of why immigrants are seeking asylum or refugee status in the US. It is vital for the understanding of why migrants are arriving to know the forces that push them out of their countries. There is a long history of the United States relationships with countries throughout the world that have led to migrants seeking refugee or asylum status. Through our trade policies, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement or the Central American Free Trade Agreement, through our history of multinational corporations stripping other countries of resources that has led to forcing people off their lands, and through wars, migrants risk their lives to seek safety and economic security here in the US. Learning about these factors is important for increasing our understanding of why migrants are here and enabling us to then be sharers of that truth with others.

Here are some potential resources to deepen your church's' understanding of why migrants are arriving :

- What are the Roots Causes of Migration?: <https://www.weareoneamerica.org/root-causes-migration-fact-sheet>
- Rethinking the Immigration Debate: Addressing the Root Causes of Migration. <http://www.rop.org/wp-content/uploads/Root%20Causes%20of%20Mexican%20Migration.pdf>
- *Illegal People: How Globalization Creates Migration and Criminalizes Immigrants* by David Bacon
- *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration*: by David Bacon

4. Study United Church of Christ Teachings on Immigration

Some congregations may find it helpful to learn about United Church of Christ teachings on immigration. Our denomination has a long history of being on the forefront of calling for justice on many issues.

Pronouncements and Resolutions Passed by General Synods

Pronouncements are a big deal. A *pronouncement* is a statement of Christian conviction on a matter of moral or social principle and has been adopted by a two-thirds vote of a General Synod. This is the strongest statement a General Synod can make. Pronouncements establish programming priorities for national boards and other General Synod related ministries. Saying no to a pronouncement is not an option for these entities.

Justice in Immigration

In 1981, General Synod XIII passed a pronouncement entitled **Justice in Immigration**. The summary¹ reads:

[This] pronouncement calls attention to global and domestic implications of United States immigration policy (both governmental and private sector) and recommends policies which call for:

- public and private practices which reduce worldwide pressures on persons to migrate
- a more open, flexible and humane United States immigration and refugee policy
- more humane administration of immigration law protecting civil rights
- protection of undocumented persons during transition to new policies and laws
- greater involvement of the United Church of Christ in aiding immigrants in resettlement

General Synod Resolutions

Since then, General Synods have passed many resolutions speaking to the church on the vital humanitarian issues that surround immigration justice.

- **In Support of Salvadoran Refugees** (GS XIII, 1981)
- **Affirming the Dignity and Self-Worth of Immigrants** (GS XX, 1995)
- **Border justice issues** (GS XXII, 1999)
- **Emergency resolution to end the death of migrants on the United States-Mexico border by offering water in Christ's Name** (GS XXIII, 2001)
- **Call for a more humane US immigration policy; end immigrant deaths; support immigrant communities** (GS XXVI, 2007): border enforcement strategy is inhumane and ineffective, guarantee rights to immigrant workers.
- **Resolution Supporting Compassionate Comprehensive Immigration Reform and the Protection of the Human Rights of Immigrants** (GS XXIX, 2013)
- **On Becoming An Immigrant Welcoming Church** (GS XXXI, 2017)

5. Explore Immigration in Documentary & Film

A good way for a church to begin their journey of learning more about the story of our current migrants is through the viewing of a documentary or film at your congregation.

- **Harvest Of Empire: The Story Of Latinos In America.** Based on the landmark book, Harvest of Empire” by award-winning journalist Juan González: a feature-length documentary that reveals the direct connection between the long history of U.S. intervention in Latin America and the immigration crisis we face today. 93 minutes.
- **Papers - Stories of Undocumented Youth.** Interweaves the history of immigration in the United States with the stories of undocumented students from several nations. 88 minutes (can be adapted to 63 minutes, shorter version recommended).
- **Which Way Home** (2010; the 2010 Emmy Award For Outstanding Informational Programming The Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award). Which Way Home shows the personal side of immigration through the eyes and stories of children. These are stories of hope and courage, disappointment and sorrow. 83 minutes.
- **Lost in Detention: The Hidden World of Immigration Enforcement (2011)**
more than one million immigrants have been deported since President Obama took office, deportations and detentions have reached record levels. The get-tough policy has brought complaints of abuse and harsh treatment. This PBS Frontline film investigates Obama's enforcement strategies and journeys into the secretive world of immigrant detention, with a penetrating look at who is being detained and what is happening to them. 60 minutes.
Free to view online!
- **Not In Our Town: Light In The Darkness (2011)**
This documentary follows a community in crisis after the fatal attack on a local immigrant resident. Stunned by the violence, diverse community stakeholders openly confront the crime and the divisive atmosphere, and commit to ongoing actions to prevent future hate crimes and intolerance. 60 minutes.
- **Brother Towns:** 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. A great ‘first film’ that explores why people come and the different responses of people in Jupiter, Florida to the immigrants in their community. 58 minutes.
- **AbUSed:** An important film about the Postville immigration raid and the aftermath; describes what happened, its effects on the Postville community and the immigrants and their families; includes interviews with participants and visits individuals who were deported after their return to Guatemala (including citizen children born in the US). 97 minutes.
- **Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey (2006)** An excellent film introducing us to migrants, why they come to the United States, and the dangerous journey many make to cross our southern border. 33 minutes.
- **Who Is Dayani Cristal?** An anonymous body in the Arizona desert sparks the beginnings of a real-life human drama. The search for identity leads us back across the continent to seek out the people left behind and the meaning of a mysterious tattoo.

6. Explore Immigration in Worship and Communion

Worship is an intentional communal thin spot. It is a place where we intentionally prepare ourselves to encounter God. Within the worship experience lives transform, questions reframe, priorities reorder, and purposes realign to God's purpose through the power of the Holy Spirit. Communities which explore their connections to their immigrant sisters and brothers within the context of worship will naturally form deeper connections with the people and the stories they uncover there.

For this reason, we found it important to include a resources that congregations can use to facilitate worship planning. These resources are available through the United Church of Christ and our ecumenical partners.

Prayers, Litanies, and Liturgies

- Immigration Justice Worship Resources, United Church of Christ
http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration_worship_index This page contains prayers, litanies, complete liturgies, and sermon examples compiled over the last decade.
- Not One More Deportation: Worship Resources for Immigrant Rights Sunday
http://www.ucc.org/justice_immigration_worship_not-one-more-deportation
- Prayers and Litanies for Worship <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/resources/migrant-sunday-liturgy/>
- A collection of prayers regarding immigration from various Christian denominations
<http://www.uua.org/immigration/worship/index.shtml>
- Responsive readings, prayer and scripture resources
<http://www.welcometheimmigrant.org/worship/>
- Worship Tools (Litanies for the uprooted, refugees and asylees)
<http://lirs.org/worship-tools/>

Hymns from the New Century Hymnal

- Tú has venido a la orilla (You have come down to the Lakeshore), (173)
- De Colores (Sing of Colors), (402)
- We are Marching in the Light of God, (526)
- We Are Not Our Own, (564)
- Lead Us From Death to Life, (581) Based on 2 John 1:3; Isa. 2:2-4
- Through all the world a hungry Christ (587)
- How Beautiful, Our Spacious Skies (594) Affirmation of the Americas, indigenous and immigrant peoples
- This is My Song (591) Hope for lasting peace & justice among nations, peoples and cultures
- O for a World (575) Based on Acts 4:32-35; 1 Cor. 1:26-31; 1 Pet. 3:8-12
- Profetiza, Pueblo mío (You Shall Prophesy, All My People) (578), Solidarity with the oppressed and the call to build a loving, just society
- For the Healing of the Nations (576) Justice, peace and human rights
- Lead On Eternal Sovereign (573) Prayer, preparation and strength for the work of justice
- Spirit of Jesus, If I Love My Neighbor (590) Based on Rom. 13:8-14.

7. Create an Immersion Experience

The best way to get excited about becoming an immigrant welcoming congregation is through meeting and getting to know our immigrant brothers and sisters. Where two or three are gathered, there is God in the midst of us. This has surely been the case for those who have had the opportunity to spend time getting to know immigrants. If your congregational networks aren't yet connected to immigrant leaders in your community there are other ways to engage with the immigrant community.

- Join others organizations in your areawho sponsor marches or vigils with our immigrant brothers or sisters.
- Visit a church where immigrants attend and begin conversations.
- Become a Conversation With Friends visitor and have meaningful visits with those immigrants who are detained.
- Volunteer to be an ESL teacher or assistant
- Consider making a trip to Central America through the SHARE Foundation <http://www.share-elsalvador.org/>
- Make a border trip where you can meet immigrants and learn their difficulties in escaping the violence in their country as well as what they have experienced since arriving.
 - Contact Vicki Schmidt at Abriendo Fronteras: <http://www.openingborders.com/> for trips to the El Paso/ Ciudad Juarez border
 - Contact Borderlinks at <http://www.borderlinks.org/> for info about trips to the border at Tucson and Nogales
 - Green Valley Samaritans housed at the Good Shepherd UCC <https://www.gvs-samaritans.org/>

8. Hold a Small Group or Congregation Wide Book Study

There are many helpful books written about the immigrants that have come to the United States. Some of those books detail the policies that the US has put in place which have led to migration for thousands of people. Others detail what the journey is like for migrants as they seek safety and economic security. Or you may be interested in learning about the experience of those without papers and are forced to live in the shadows. You can also read about the contributions that immigrants make to our communities. If you have people who like to read in your congregation, you may want to conduct a book discussion based on one of the following books.

- *Faces of Change* by Joan Jarvis Ellison (the story of immigrants from around the world coming to work in a turkey factory, this book explores the challenges for the migrants as well as the challenges for those living in this small rural Minnesota community. Read how five women mobilized a community to offer an extravagant welcome.)
- *Open Borders: the Case Against Immigration Controls* by Teresa Hayter
- *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* by Luis Alberto Urrea

- *Tailings of War and Peace* by Stephen Law
- *Our God is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigration Justice* by Chad Myers and Matthew Colwell
- *The Politics of Immigration* by Jane Guskin and David L. Wilson
- *The Right to Stay Home: How US policy Drives Mexican Migration* by David Bacon
- *One Family Under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religions in America* by Grace Yukich
- *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother* by Sonia Nazario
- *No Longer Strangers: The Practice of Radical Hospitality* by Rev. Wendy Taylor a UCC pastor whose passion for working with immigrants begins to ignite a fire in her church and community and leads to the creation of a new organization with broad community support.
- *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal* by Aviva Chomsky
- *Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing Jobs Most Americans Won't Do* by Gabriel Thompson follow this reporter as he goes undercover for a year to better understand the life of immigrants living in the shadows.
- *They Are Us: Lutherans and Immigration* by Stephen Bowman and Ralston Deffenbaugh
- *Just Coffee: Caffeine with a Conscience* by Mark Adams and Tommy Bassett III, Publisher: Just Trade Center, ISBN: 978-0981797601

9. Prayerful Action: Get Involved in a Local Campaign

“and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?”

Micah 6:8 NRSV

It is in the doing of justice that we experience the God of justice walking with us. We are called to action! There are many ways that you can get involved in seeing that justice is done for our immigrant brothers and sisters. One of those is through prayerful action.

1. **Hold or join a prayer vigil:** Many areas hold regular prayer vigils at detention centers, get involved with what's already happening or start your own vigils and prayer services.
2. **Stay Informed:** Most state legislature sessions run January through June each year, and increasingly there are state bills being proposed, Keep abreast of what is happening in the Legislative session. This year there is a bill that will decide if a for profit prison will be opened in Appleton, MN. Join others in campaigning against this. For several years the Legislature has debated whether or not to grant driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants. We continue this campaign. .

3. **Call your legislators:** Sign up on the UCC National Immigration Collaborative listserv to get regular updates and all in actions at both the federal and state levels including immigration and refugee issues. Email: nandersen@cwsglobal.org to get added to the list.
4. **Join Direct Actions:** Join local, state and national campaign actions for immigrants' and refugee rights. Campaign actions are happening regular in support of sanctuary cities, Dream Act, tuition equity or to stop anti-immigrant bills at the state level. Create your own faith rooted actions with ethical spectacle elements such as a public communion or foot washing with immigrants and refugees.
5. **Join the Sanctuary Movement:** For congregations that are ready for an advanced level of commitment and action, consider the spectrum of solidarity actions from legal clinics to actually hosting someone facing a deportation order in your congregation. More resources and toolkits can be found at <https://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/>

10. Create a Covenant

When your congregation has decided that they want to embrace becoming an immigrant welcoming congregation, developing a covenant is the next important step to take. A covenant in our faith tradition is an agreement that God makes with God's people. It indicates what God will do and what God's faithful followers are to do. This is not something to be taken lightly. It is a sacred arrangement. Create a covenant that fits what your church sees as God's call to them. Each covenant will look unique to that particular congregation. It is important that the covenant has "feet." In other words, when your congregation is ready to declare itself an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation, your covenant should include what your congregation will do to continue that covenantal journey.

Examples of covenants adopted by a Minnesota UCC congregations:

Mayflower Community Congregational Church

Mayflower Community Congregational Church has been transformed by opportunities to walk beside and learn from immigrants who have come to our church, who live in our neighborhoods and who we have met at the border. We covenant with God and each other to continue to seek out, welcome and deepen relationships with our immigrant brothers and sisters and to work together with them to see that immigrant justice is done.

The following is supportive to the above covenant.

Resources from the Scriptures

Leviticus 19:33b-34 (Jewish and Christian traditions)

The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as you love yourself for you were an immigrant in the land of Egypt.

Surah 4:36 (Quran, Muslim Tradition)

Do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbor from among your own peoples, and the neighbor who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, and the wayfarer and your servant.

Some Things We Can Continue to Do

- Pray for immigrants, that just laws are passed that will support immigrants, such as a driver's license for all
- Continue to learn about the root causes of migration
- Speak out against injustices that immigrants face such as exploitive labor policies
- Support congregations where immigrants facing unfair deportation are in sanctuary.
- Invite immigrants to share their stories here at Mayflower
- Support local initiatives by immigrants

Join the UCC National Collaborative on Immigration

Please write Rev. Noel Andersen at nandersen@cwsglobal.org if you would like to be added to the immigration and refugee listserv with regular updates and action alerts. If you would like to get more involved on refugee issues please write Amanda Sheldon at sheldona@ucc.org or Mary Schaller-Blaufuss at BlaufusM@ucc.org.