

Become an Immigrant Welcoming Community

The United Methodist Church affirms the worth, dignity and inherent value and rights of every person regardless of their nationality or legal status. Welcoming immigrants is not only an act of mission; it is an opportunity to receive God's grace. The United Methodist Church understands that at the center of Christian faithfulness to Scripture is the call we have been given to love and welcome the sojourner. We invite United Methodist churches to journey together to become Immigrant Welcoming Communities living out our faith into action. Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Community is a journey open to entire congregations or to individual classes, United Methodist Women units, Wesley Foundations, youth groups, or other smaller groups within congregations. Whatever size the community is that decides to enter into this journey, the purpose is to deepen and widen the involvement of United Methodists building welcoming communities and working for immigrant justice. We want to move beyond the "usual suspects" in our struggle for justice and invite people to deepen their understanding and build relationships based on mutuality and love. The journey is about moving forward in a process within your class, unit, group, community or entire congregation and, with the support of other communities in your region, to expand the network of faith communities who are a public moral voice for building welcoming communities.

Goals of the Journey to Become an Immigrant Welcoming Community:

- To build welcoming communities for newly arriving immigrants based on loving, mutual, reciprocal, egalitarian relationships
- This journey will provide an opportunity for local United Methodists to build a long-term sustainable movement to defend and support the rights of immigrants.
- By participating in this journey classes, units, Wesley Foundations, youth groups, and entire congregations will be equipped to travel from mercy to justice, from service- only to incarnational friendship, from ministering to immigrants to being transformed alongside of immigrant communities.
- This journey offers communities opportunities for leadership development

How Becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Community Works:

The journey toward becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Community is a lifelong journey, but our process to begin this lifelong journey takes 4 months. Each month your class, unit, Wesley Foundation, youth group, or entire congregation will commit to the following:

- A learning event or action that can, and often should include participation from a nearby immigrant congregation or community group. These events can take place on Sunday mornings, or at other times that work for your community. There are often multiple options with each specific step and so more than one learning event or action can be planned for each month
- A time of reflection over what you learned from the event or action
- A time of planning for the next month's event or action as well as how to include other communities in your congregations, or other congregations

The journey to become an Immigrant Welcoming Community takes four steps. They are:

Month 1: Understanding and Articulating our Faith

Beginning with our faith, let us learn and deepen our knowledge of what Scripture says about, hospitality, welcoming immigrants and moving from mercy to justice. This is the beginning of the journey, a time to ground ourselves in Scripture and to recognize the human dignity of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

Goals:

1. Learn about the pervasive theme of hospitality throughout the Bible
2. Embrace the calling all Christians have to justice ministries
3. Know what the United Methodist Church says about immigration (Social Principles, Resolutions)

Options for learning events or actions:

- Bible study on Immigration from Faith perspective:
 - See the Bible study activity “Thinking Biblically about Immigration” developed by Bill Mefford, GBCS-UMC
- Film screening of Jasmine’s Story and discussion on how our faith calls us to welcome the immigrant among us: <http://rethinkchurch.org/article/immigration>
Jasmine Franco is a 19-year-old college student studying to become a doctor. She made the dean's list both fall and winter semesters last year and works part-time helping immigrant workers at a student-run organization. If you met Jasmine in person, you would think she's a typical teenager. Experience her story, though, and you'll see something different
(Jasmine's Story DVD's can be received by contacting Sol Cotto)
- In addition to hosting the Bible study and screening of Jasmine’s story, we encourage you to lift up immigrants in scripture readings, prayers, liturgy or sermons during worship service. For possible resources visit:
WE NEED A NEW RESOURCE, THE UCC RESOURCE IS NO LONGER LIVE

Month 2: Building Incarnational Relationships

Learn that the roots of building a movement for justice for immigrations are incarnational relationships.

Depending on your context, this may take many different forms, but getting to know people directly affected by the issue is central to moving forward in the journey. We invite you to organize at least two of the following activities listed below.

Goals:

1. Build relationships of mutuality and respect grounded in love for one another in the journey of building the Beloved Community.
2. Start to build bridges between recent immigrant communities and non immigrants in your class, unit, Wesley Foundation, youth group or entire congregation by creating a personal connection to the issue between your community and an immigrant youth or family.
3. Map out the community you are in and the immigrant communities they serve, by listing all of the ministries members are involved in and see which ones impact immigrant communities

Options for learning events or actions:

- Host a “Cultural Potluck” among the members of your community along with another community. Share food and cultural traditions from members of the congregation and partner with other communities or congregations nearby or who share space in your building. The shared meal can be hosted by your community or by the immigrant community you partner with. It can be a large dinner or a small breakfast with lots of time for discussion and sharing.
(Resources for how to put together a cultural potluck can be received from Sol Cotto)
- Organize a group of people from your congregations to participate in a volunteer opportunity that works with immigrants in your community and then organize a group reflection after the experience:
 - English for Speakers of Other Languages classes
 - Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON) or a nearby immigration legal clinic
 - Tutoring or after-school programs
 - Day-laborers or farm-worker ministries
- Host a DREAM Sabbath in your congregation. Invite undocumented youth and/or their families to share their stories and how your congregation can support immigrant youth pursue their dreams and help pass the DREAM ACT.

(To receive the DREAM Sabbath toolkit, go to: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/resources/past-campaigns/dream-sabbath-2011/>).

- Provide pastoral care and support to people in immigration detention. Join an existing detention visitation program or explore how a group might start one. For more information visit the visitation program began by the Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services.
<http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/BRING-THE-SKY-1-WHY-VISIT.pdf>
<http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ACCESS-TOOLKIT.pdf>
<http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/BRING-THE-SKY-3-MINISTRY-BASICS.pdf>
<http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/BRING-THE-SKY-4-BEING-A-VISITOR.pdf>
<http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/BRING-THE-SKY-5-STEPS-BEYOND.pdf>
<http://lirs.org/act/visitation/>

Month 3: Education for Transformation

Education that leads to incarnational relationships and engagement is key to bringing about transformation in our churches and all of society. For this step it is important to understand that there is a wealth of information about various aspects of immigration and the learning process is never over. We should find opportunities of education throughout the course of the journey and these are just some beginning steps. We invite you to host one of the following activities listed below.

Goals:

1. Broaden the base of your immigration ministry by including other communities or your congregation as a whole in your transformational education
2. Invite new participants to the movement through educational events
3. Deepen your understanding of the issue of immigration and the challenges immigrants face every day
4. Continue to create a personal connection to immigrants by involving the stories of immigrants in all educational engagement

Options for learning events or actions:

- Have a guest speaker to your community or possibly a panel discussion with immigrant rights advocates and community leaders, including youth or families directly impacted by the immigration
 - Possible speakers could include:
 - Justice for Our Neighbor attorney or board member who can share the complexity of current immigration law and can provide an invitation for members of your community to participate in JFON's ministries
 - undocumented student sharing their testimony
 - someone who has been in immigration detention or who has had a family member deported
 - immigrant rights advocate talking about ways to support local campaigns
 - mental health professionals talking about the affects of being undocumented on the immigrants community
- Host an potluck where participants share their immigration stories, whether they are first generation immigrants or
 - This is an opportunity to reflect and learn about this migration history of your congregation. Invite participants to share their immigration stories. When did they or their ancestors come to the United States? Where did they come from? What were the reasons they migrated? How were they received when they arrived in the U.S.? If you don't know anything about your family's migration story, why is that?
 - In addition to sharing your family migration stories you can also use the workshop provided by NETWORK to begin the discussion about the different experiences of immigration in our country. Through reflection, role playing, and discussion, participants in the workshop will explore various feelings and fears surrounding immigration reform and ways to find common ground. The workshop uses biographies to

explore the experience of individuals who live the reality of the intersection of immigration and our current failed system. : <http://www.networklobby.org/nep/ImmigWorkshop3-2010> is the website and the direct link to the PDF is: http://www.networklobby.org/files/ImmigWorkshop3-2010_1.pdf.

- Host a film screening followed by a testimony of someone directly affected by the broken immigration system and have a group discussion.
 - We recommend that you use the film *The Visitor*, a 1 hour and 43 minute drama that looks at the current immigration detention and deportation system. A study guide to accompany the film can be downloaded at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6338125/The-Visitor-Discussion-Guide>
 - For other possible film titles visit: <http://crln.org/films> or a list of films that include films on immigration: <http://umc-gbcs.org/resources-websites/category/movies-docus-videos>.
- Have a panel discussion with immigrant rights advocates and community leaders, including youth or families directly impacted by the immigration
 - Possible speakers could include:
 - undocumented student sharing their testimony
 - someone who has been in immigration detention or who has had a family member deported
 - immigration attorney speaking on the current immigration laws
 - immigrant rights advocate talking about ways to support local campaigns,
 - mental health professionals talking about the affects of being undocumented on the immigrants community

Month 4: Prayerful Witness & Affirming Our Commitment

As we openly affirm our calling to be immigrant welcoming communities and to continue to build and deepen our relationships with immigrants, we look for ways to publically and prayerfully witness our commitment to our immigrant sisters and brothers. In strengthening our relationships with immigrants, we also invite other communities in our church and larger community to join with us on this journey as well. Prayerful witness offers a public way to be relationally present with immigrant communities in a public way that helps to change national perceptions and ultimately, state and national policies. Below are a few possible actions to celebrate the start of a lifelong journey and to invite other communities to join you.

Goals:

1. Create a powerful experience for our congregations to publically witness of their commitment to immigrants
2. Understand that societal transformation happens when our faith becomes public
3. Identify areas for deeper growth and learning and strategy for both continuing to teach this new learning and translating this into action
4. Identify your witness with the witness happening in other United Methodist congregations
5. Invite other classes, UMW units or smaller groups in your congregation to join you or invite other congregations as well
6. Assume a prophetic role in connecting and reconciling immigrants, dominant culture, and those in places of public power

Options for learning events or actions:

- Hold a prayer vigil at your church or other strategic location, taking into account any current local, state, national legislation or events happening around immigration
(For the guide on how to set up a prayer vigil contact Sol Cotto)
- Organize a Neighbor to Neighbor visit to meet and establish a relationship with your elected representatives
(See attached planning guide)

- Locate an immigration court nearby which deals with immigration and witness the court proceedings and have a discussion afterwards.
- Host a letter writing party on a specific issue facing immigrants in your area. Ask your elected representatives for fairer treatment for our immigrant sisters and brothers while as a community you discuss the specific issues. Invite other communities in your church or community-at-large to join with you. Have food and music and allow this time of advocacy to be a time of joy and community.
(For more information on specific issues to write on and for possible sample letters, please contact Sol Cotto)
- Bless the community's ongoing ministry on this issue - create a moment when the community makes a sacred commitment to continue to welcome immigrants.
(For a sample covenant and order of worship for this celebration please contact Sol Cotto)
- Present your covenant before the rest of the congregation during a time of worship and invite them to begin their journey as well while offering to walk with them through the steps.
- Invite your congregation to display a public symbol to identify your congregation as an Immigrant Welcoming Community. (For the symbol other Immigrant Welcoming Communities have been using, please contact Sol Cotto)
- We invite one or two leaders from the community to join the UMC Rapid Response Teams to unite with other United Methodists committed to defending and supporting the rights of immigrants and to find new ways to continue your journey on being an immigrant welcoming community.

For more information, contact Sol Cotto at scotto@umc-gbcs.org or Bill Mefford, director of Civil & Human Rights, General Board of Church & Society, at bmefford@umc-gbcs.org.