

Welcoming the World to our Doorstep!

(Theological Reflection on Immigration)



Packet and Pledge

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Study and Action Guide for Welcoming the World to our Doorstep Packet and Pledge

DHM's Refugee and Immigration Ministries (RIM) program invites you to participate in theological reflection on immigration issues from a faith perspective.

This packet is intended to help congregations, regions, general ministries institutions and organizations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in their **reflection** on immigration issues from a faith perspective. It is hoped that, after such reflection, a **decision** will be made to sign the “**Welcoming the World to our Doorstep**” Pledge. Once that decision has been made, it is further hoped that there will be **action** steps taken to provide a concrete welcome to people regardless of their immigration status.

The Reflection

Contained in this packet are five theological reflections on immigration from four Disciples theologians and from a World Council of Churches gathering. There is no particular order in which these reflections need to be read or discussed. They are listed here simply in alphabetical order by author's last name.

- Eric Brown – “Reflection Paper on the Immigration Problem in the United States”
- Michael Kinnamon – “Biblical Principles and Middle Axioms on Immigration”
- Tim Lee – “What God Has Made Clean, We Must not Call Profane: Let's Not Get Too Comfortable with the Familiar”
- Daisy Machado – “The Prophetic Call to a Healthy Community and our Response to Immigration”
- Jennifer Riggs – “WCC Theological Reflection on Migration”

Suggestions for the Reflection Process

Please adapt these suggestions as appropriate for your congregation, region, general ministry, institution, or organization.

1. Invite interested persons to a series of gatherings to discuss immigration from a faith perspective.
2. Begin the gatherings with worship – use some of the prayers and litanies available in the Worship Material on the RIM Web site mentioned below.
3. At the first gathering, introduce the packet material and the process you will be using. Invite people to briefly share their own family's immigration history. Invite an immigrant in your community to share his/her own personal story. If that is not possible, use some of the small group discussions, role plays, videos/DVDs, or other material available in “Resources for Promoting Refugee and Immigration Ministries in your Congregation” on the RIM Web site mentioned below.
4. In subsequent gatherings, divide into small groups that allow each person to have time to fully participate in conversation.
5. Have participants read one or two of the six theological reflections before each gathering so they are prepared to discuss them. Alternatively, have each group read and discuss only one of the theological reflections and then bring back a report of their discussions to the whole group.



6. Use the “Questions for Discussion of Theological Reflections” (below) to guide the discussion around each theological reflection.
7. Seriously consider using “Undocumented Persons: Should we Blame or Welcome them?” One of the important issues that this piece speaks to is the legality of the undocumented and the fact that many of them have only violated a minor civil offense, rather than a criminal offense. It is available on the RIM Web site mentioned below.
8. If time permits, use some of the additional material mentioned below from the RIM Web site for further discussion.
9. Invite participants between sessions to use two games on the internet that will give them some idea of what immigrants face in trying to get to or remain in the United States: “Against All Odds” – <http://www.playagainstallodds.com/> and “ICED – I Can End Deportation” – <http://www.icedgame.com/>
10. Hold a final gathering to consider if you want to sign the pledge and how you will act upon that pledge by choosing some welcoming action.

Other Resources:

In addition to the five theological reflections in this packet (listed above), many other resources for your reflection exist on the Disciples Refugee and Immigration Ministries (RIM) Web site. Probably the most important of these resources relevant to this discussion is the one that talks specifically about undocumented persons and some of the misinformation the public has about them – “Undocumented Persons: Should we blame or welcome them?”

This additional material is available by going to the RIM Web site at www.discipleshomemissions.org/rim/ and clicking on “Welcome Pledge.” It includes:

- Undocumented Persons: Should we blame or welcome them?
- What does the Bible Say about Refugees and Immigrants?
- Worship Materials on Refugee and Immigration Issues
- Understanding U.S. Immigration Categories (*Available in English and Spanish*)
- Asylum, Detention, Deportation, and the Legal Rights of the Undocumented
- Resources for Promoting Refugee and Immigration Ministries in your Congregation (*Containing role plays, discussion starters, available videos/DVDs, etc.*)
- History of: Our Immigrant and Anti-Immigrant Nation, Our Immigrant Denomination, and Our Disciples’ Refugee and Immigration Ministries Program
- Advocacy Tips

Questions for Discussion of Theological Reflections

The following are intended to help small groups guide their discussion of the theological reflections.

Reflection from Eric Brown

- Do you agree with Eric that global poverty is the main cause of undocumented immigration? Do you agree that the United States is the cause of much of that poverty? Whether or not you agree, does the United States bear any responsibility in helping people who are forced to move for economic reasons?
- Eric lifts up several places where scripture emphasizes hospitality. Can you think of other examples? Which is most important in guiding your actions – scripture or the realities of the world today?
- What rights and privileges do you think should be given only to citizens? Why should these rights and privileges not be given to immigrants who have not yet become citizens?

- In what ways are you aware of undocumented immigrants being taken advantage of in the United States?
- Do you agree that undocumented immigrants (working for less than a minimum wage) undermine the ability of citizens to negotiate for higher wages? Do you think most citizens don't want the jobs that the undocumented take? Do you think that globalization has a small or large impact on the loss of jobs for citizens?
- Is obeying the law the most important thing for Christians? What does the 13th chapter of Romans mean about submitting to governing authorities? Is submission to the U.S. government any different than what Paul was talking about regarding the Roman government?
- Do you agree that responsible citizens should report undocumented immigrants they help to the authorities? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Do you agree that citizens should influence politics? Do you agree that the church has the power to make the government do right?
- What impact do you think his being African American makes on Eric's reflection on immigration? Does who we are as persons have an impact on our theological reflections? Does our own experience of oppression have an impact on our attitudes about others who are oppressed?

Reflection from Michael Kinnamon

- What scripture passages can you find that demonstrate the biblical principle that each person is of infinite worth and should be treated with dignity and compassion?
- What scripture passages can you find that demonstrate the biblical principle that the human family is fundamentally interdependent?
- What scripture passages can you find that demonstrate the biblical principle that Christians have a particular obligation to welcome the stranger.
- Do you agree that on the issue of immigration many Christians think politically rather than theologically? If so, how can that be changed?
- Do you agree with the axiom that the undocumented have basic human rights that must be respected? If so, what are the rights that they should receive?
- Do you agree that the axiom that immigration should be dealt with in the context of other issues that lead to migration? If so, do you see as some of the major factors that contribute to migration?
- Do you agree with the axiom that human community is enriched by the presence of immigrants? How have you been enriched by the presence of immigrants?
- Has 9/11 had a direct impact on the attitudes of persons in your community regarding immigrants? Are those attitudes based on facts or fear?
- Can you give examples of how the presence of undocumented workers benefits employers and consumers, but not the "least" already among us?
- Can you give examples of how increased migration to the United States can weaken countries of origin?
- Where do you fall in Michael's description of the world as universal (valuing the intermingling of cultures and peoples) versus the world as communal (valuing the particularity of cultures and peoples while trying to break down walls between them)?

Reflection from Tim Lee

- Tim reflected on immigration from the perspective of being an immigrant himself. Does who we are as persons have an impact on our theological reflections? Does the history of our own or our family's immigration have an impact on our attitudes towards immigrants today?

- Tim did not actually mention undocumented persons in his sermon. Are there things we can learn about how we should treat undocumented persons from this sermon? If so, what are those lessons?
- How have you observed others judging undocumented persons as “unclean?” How have you judged undocumented persons to be “unclean” in the past?
- When you think of undocumented persons, do persons from Asia or the Pacific Islands come to mind? Do Canadians come to mind? Do the Irish come to mind? If not, why don’t these persons (some of whom are undocumented) come to mind?
- Do you agree with what Tim says in the preface about even procedurally correct laws having the potential to be immoral and unchristian? If so, which immigration laws do you believe to be immoral and unchristian?
- Have you ever “blundered” (to use Tim’s word) by treating someone without compassion because they were “other” than you?
- Like the soldier Tim talked about who watched a Muslim at prayer and recognized his spiritual connection to the person, does the fact that there are undocumented Disciples of Christ members make you see undocumented persons in a different light?
- Can you think of ways that you can overcome your propensity to be comfortable with the familiar?

Reflection from Daisy Machado

- Can you give examples of the ambivalence of this nation that both welcomes immigrants and tries to keep immigrants out?
- What do you think Christianity has to say about immigrants?
- What theological insight and guidance do you think the Christian community can lift up to the nations who receive that never ending flow of human lives?
- What are your thoughts about the relationship of immigration and the Biblical hope of restoration?
- Do you agree that the markers of a healthy community are justice, mercy, and compassion?
- What specific acts would demonstrate justice, mercy, and compassion to immigrants today?
- What is the difference in standing with someone as opposed to standing for someone by being a do-gooder?
- Can you give examples of how Jesus de-centered the center (those places of power, prestige and wealth) to focus on those who were left-out, excluded, de-valued, pushed aside, ignored, and dismissed?
- Are there examples in your own life where you overcame fear to see the person before you without judgment and became vulnerable to reach out to them?
- If we started living “tenderly” how would that change our response to immigration?
- Do you believe the United States “shames itself” in how it treats immigrants?

Reflection from Jennifer Riggs

Many questions are interspersed throughout this reflection. They should be sufficient for carrying forward the WCC platform discussion in your conversations. Try to keep the conversation focused on the three themes of:

- Migration, God and Place;
- Migration, God and Humanity; and
- Migration, God and the Church.

The Decision

Once you have completed your reflection and discussions of the theological reflections and any additional material you choose to use, you are encouraged to make a decision about signing the “Welcoming the World to our Doorstep” Pledge. The text of the pledge is as follows:

In response to the Gospel call to welcome the stranger and provide justice to the foreigner in our midst, we welcome all persons regardless of their national origin or immigration status.

We pledge ourselves to:

1. Welcome persons to our worship services and/or other gatherings regardless of their immigration status;
2. Provide our ministries to all persons regardless of their immigration status; and
3. Advocate for just, humane, and compassionate treatment of all persons who seek safety and/or economic well-being among us, regardless of their immigration status.

The pledge form to print, sign and send to the Refugee and Immigration Ministries office can be found by going to the RIM Web site at www.discipleshomemissions.org/rim/ and clicking on “Welcome Pledge.”

The Action

Now that you have signed the pledge, how will you live out your commitment to be welcoming of persons regardless of immigration status? The list of possible actions is limitless, but here are some possibilities:

- Find an immigrant congregation in your community and invite them to share with you in a joint activity.
- Find community service providers that work with immigrants and ask how you can help.
- Start English-as-a-Second-Language classes in your building. Plan the classes for times when people don't have to work. Plan child care during the classes. Plan transportation to the classes, if needed.
- Start Spanish, Korean, Creole, etc. classes in your building to help your own members be more welcoming to newcomers who don't yet understand English.
- Set up a plan for the care of the undocumented in your congregation if they are picked up in raids. The Presbyterians have developed a packet for churches to prepare for such a circumstance. It includes information on powers of attorney, delegation of parental authority, impoundment of cars, etc. It is available on the Presbyterian Web site in English or Spanish:
<http://www.pcusa.org/immigration/pdf/family-care-plan.pdf>
<http://www.pcusa.org/immigration/pdf/plan-de-cuidado-de-familiar.pdf>
- Help your local schools and day care centers prepare a plan of action about what to do with children if there is an immigration raid in your community and parents are picked up for deportation, without the opportunity to plan care for their children. (Be sure to consider in that plan how to handle nursing babies.)

- Consult with any immigration lawyers in your community and ask them what kinds of supportive services you can provide their clients. (Lawyers can only work on the legal needs but often have clients with social service needs also.)
- Talk with your local prisons to determine if they ever house immigrants in detention and ask what kind of services (religious and social) you could provide, if they do. (More and more communities have government-owned or contracted facilities that detain immigrants; several of those contract facilities detain children, with or without their parents. Additionally, local prisons are also being used to hold immigration detainees.)
- Since undocumented persons cannot access government benefits such as Social Security, explore services you can provide for elderly members of such families who are totally dependent on others who are mostly away at work.
- Look out for employers who exploit the undocumented status of persons in order to take advantage of them or abuse them, and confront that abuse.
- Keep informed on current immigration issues – sign up for Refugee and Immigration Ministries’ “Update” which is posted on the Web about four times a year. Sign up at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/rim/WhatsNew.htm>.
- Advocate for just, humane, and compassionate immigration legislation – sign up for the Disciples Refugee and Immigration Ministries’ “Rapid Response” action alerts and for the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program’s “Speak Out” action alerts. Sign up for Rapid Response at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/rim/Advocate.htm> and for Speak Out at http://www.churchworldservice.org/Educ_Advo/refugees/index.html.
- Share what you have learned (about being welcoming of immigrants regardless of immigration status) with your whole community, by writing letters to your local newspaper.

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Reflection Paper on the Immigration Problem in the United States

By Dr. Eric H. Brown

An African American, Eric Brown, is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); he is Pastor of Woodland Christian Church in Columbus, Ohio, and serves as President of the Disciples Black Ministers' Fellowship.

As I reflect on the Church's role concerning the immigration issue, it occurred to me that there wouldn't be an illegal immigration problem if global poverty did not exist. The level of poverty south of the border and around the world is greater than the poverty in the United States. In some way, illegal immigration may be forcing the United States to reap what it has sown. Much of the global poverty that exists on this planet can be blamed on the United States of America. The United States is the wealthiest nation in the world and we still wield much power in the global economy despite the fact that we are also a nation in tremendous debt. Poor people everywhere who hear of the wealthy nation called the United States of America look at this nation as the nation where they can make their dreams come true, or at least their children can make their dreams come true. What parent doesn't want a better life for her or his child? The United States represents the land of opportunity, and with the statue of liberty stating, "Give me your poor huddled masses yearning to be free," poor people around the globe long to move to the United States to begin a completely new life, a life they hope will be free of poverty.

The Church must obey fundamental doctrines represented in scripture. A Christian congregation that does not adhere to scriptural doctrines might need to question whether it should call itself a church. One of the doctrines the Church must obey is the doctrine of hospitality. Represented by several scriptures (I shall cite a few; Genesis 18: 1-8, Exodus 2: 20-21, II Samuel 9: 1-13, II Kings 4: 8-10, Matthew 7: 7-12, St. John 6: 1-13, Acts 16: 13-15, Revelation 3: 20), hospitality is a major theme in scripture. The Israelites were commanded to be kind to immigrants and to treat them as if they were citizens. "Love him as you love yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt" (Leviticus 19: 33-34). "Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him/her, for you were aliens in Egypt" (Exodus 22: 21). The Lord commanded Israel to be kind to immigrants and there were no laws that governed entrance into the nation. Foreigners could come and go as they pleased.

However, even in the bible, citizenship means something. A citizen of Israel had rights and privileges noncitizens did not enjoy in spite of Leviticus 19: 33-34. A non-Israelite male had to be circumcised to become a citizen of Israel as well as agree to serve the Lord. In the United States, citizenship means something. We get to vote. We get to work at least for minimum wage. We have rights even when arrested for a crime. We can live anywhere we can afford to live. We enjoy freedom of religion. All children who are citizens have to go to school, are required to get an education, until the age of sixteen. Our food is scrutinized by the government for safety, even pet food. We have access to medical care if we can afford it or if it is an emergency. We enjoy freedom of speech. We can get help to start our own businesses in this nation. We can obtain permits to hold protests. We enjoy freedom of assembly. We have the right to bear arms. If women with children can't get a job, they can receive welfare. As a matter of fact, the mother doesn't have to be a citizen of this nation. If her children are born here, she is eligible for welfare so that she can provide for her children who are citizens.



The poor in this nation are richer than the poor in the rest of the world. If the poor in the rest of the world are at the bottom, there is no place for

them to go but up. For a lot of poor people who live near this nation, up is setting foot on U.S. soil. The poor people who are successful at crossing the border into this country are willing to work for less than minimum wage, but what they earn here is still more, in most cases much more, than what they could earn in their own countries. The ability of poor people from other countries to enter this nation is what makes illegal immigration a problem. It takes money to enter this nation legally. It takes money for an immigrant to become a citizen. There are smugglers who will smuggle people across our borders for a fee. The poor who can come up with the fee are smuggled across our borders. The poor who are unable to save enough money to pay the fee take their chances sneaking across our borders on their own. Many enter our nation safely, but some do not.

However the poor get here, those with families can in no way afford to apply for citizenship. They are cursed to be labeled illegal immigrants. As long as they agree to work for less than minimum wage, they will never be able to afford to apply for citizenship. In the meantime, illegal immigrants, working for less than minimum wage, undermine the ability of citizens to negotiate for higher wages. Illegal immigrants do not pay income taxes. Their employers pay them in cash. Yet, they enjoy just about everything provided by our tax dollars. They benefit from police and fire protection. They benefit from well paved streets and highways. Their children benefit from tax revenues that go to public schools. They can go to medical clinics funded by our taxes. They enjoy the protection our military provides to the entire nation.

Illegal immigrants make no contribution to any benefits provided by income tax revenues because their employers don't deduct income taxes from their pay which encourages employers to operate illegally. Their employers do not take social security out of their pay. What happens to them when they get too old to perform manual labor? Illegal immigrants who desire to make large sums of money in this nation are tempted to get involved in the illegal narcotics racket or commit other crimes. All poor people are tempted to make money illegally, but when illegal immigrants break the law, tax payers pay for the man hours it takes law enforcement to solve the crime, prosecute the offenders, and then deport them. Illegal immigrants do not carry automobile insurance. When they cause an automobile accident, the victim's insurance company has to repair the victim's car.

While numerous problems and examples of exploitation could be expressed, in the midst of all of the problems caused by illegal immigration and in the midst of all the problems caused by employers who exploit illegal immigrants, the Church is obligated to offer hospitality to the stranger. Should being illegal make a difference? Not in terms of helping anybody in need, but as Christian citizens of the United States, aren't we obligated to obey the laws of the land? In the thirteenth chapter of Romans, the apostle Paul encourages us to submit to governing authorities "for there is no authority except that which God has established" (Romans 13: 1). One responsibility of government is to protect the rights and privileges of citizenship and we all know that the government expects us to help protect our citizenship.

While there are congregations eager to help illegal immigrants when they come across the border with food, clothes, temporary shelter, and maybe even some medical care, responsible citizens would report illegal immigrants they help to the authorities. There are those who will be quick to say that if the immigrants are from Mexico, if they report the immigrants to the authorities and the immigrants are deported, those same immigrants will return at their earliest opportunity. Illegal immigration, reporting the illegal immigrants to the authorities, deportation, and the return of the deported immigrants, it is all just a revolving door. Why waste time reporting illegal immigrants? I would like to make a suggestion to consider.

I strongly believe that Christian citizens have the right to influence politics and should actively participate in politics. The Christian Right has the right idea, the wrong agenda, but the right idea. Christian citizens should influence politics and Christians should hold elected officials accountable for their service, or the lack thereof. If there is an organization that can help the government produce fair and effective immigration policies, it is the Church. If there is an organization that can help the government produce righteous foreign policies, it is the Church. The greatest knowledge I have gained from the Civil rights Movement is that the Church can make the government do right. Granted, there is separation of church and state in this country, but as citizens, we can rely on our Christian faith to help us make political decisions and to help our government make political decisions.

It has been noted by all United States citizens trying to find a solution to illegal immigration that we have at least twelve million illegal immigrants in our nation and it is impossible to deport them all. President Bush has a plan that makes sense to me. The President would like to get all illegal immigrants documented and placed on a track to citizenship. They can pay for their entrance into the process toward citizenship in monthly installments automatically deducted from their pay by their employers, along with income taxes and social security. Opponents of this plan call it amnesty for the immigrants, but I have never known amnesty to come with a price. By its very nature, amnesty is free. Therefore, real amnesty is what we're doing now about 12 million illegal immigrants in our nation, NOTHING.

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Biblical Principles and Middle Axioms on Immigration

By Dr. Michael Kinnamon

Michael Kinnamon is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); he is the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

Preface

This theological reflection is an excerpt from my presentation to a Public Forum on Immigration sponsored by University Christian Church in Austin, Texas in the spring of 2007.

– Michael Kinnamon

Prior to his presentation at that forum, Dr. Kinnamon set the stage for the involvement of Christians in public debate on immigration issues by commenting: “Christians...should contribute to public debate on the basis of their understanding of the Gospel. One of the dangers of advocacy, of course, is that politically charged issues have a tendency to split the church...unless we talk together with the aim of discerning the will of God, rather than winning victories over theological opponents.”

A DVD of the entire forum is available on loan from Refugee and Immigration Ministries – see contact information at end of this reflection.

Presentation:

When thinking about immigration (or any such issue), it is important to distinguish between biblical themes or principles, on which Christians should seek agreement, and policy applications of those principles, on which some degree of disagreement is likely, even healthy. With this in mind, I want to name three scripturally-grounded principles that I try to keep in mind when thinking, as a Christian, about immigration. There obviously are others we might identify, but these three are surely foundational: 1) Each person—resident or migrant, documented or undocumented—is of infinite worth as a child of God, made in God’s image, and should therefore be treated with dignity and compassion. 2) The human family, as part of God’s creation, is fundamentally interdependent. No corner of the world should say to another, “We have no need of you” or “You have no claim on us.” 3) Christians have a particular obligation to welcome the stranger, even as God in Christ has welcomed us. The theologian, Miroslav Volf, puts it nicely when he suggests that the Bible has two persistent commandments: have no strange gods and love strangers. This is not a call for tolerance but hospitality, based on a recognition of essential relatedness. It is a reminder that the commandment to love neighbors does not just mean those who are like ourselves, and that the faithfulness of the church is measured by how we treat the “least” among us.

When it comes to a hot button issue like immigration reform, many Christians, I think it is fair to say, think politically rather than theologically (think in terms of our own self-interest instead of seeking the guidance of our faith community); and so it is important to teach and discuss these biblical themes. The problem, of course, is that two Christians can explicitly affirm these points and still reach quite different conclusions about whether to support a particular piece of legislation. So let’s explore the ground in between. What we sometimes call “middle axioms” are affirmations that are more specific than a biblical principle but not as specific as a congressional bill. It is here that I think Christians can have very profitable conversation.



For example, I would propose that the following middle axioms flow from the biblical themes named above:

First, all persons who migrate here legally should be helped to adjust to life in this new setting and treated appreciatively, as fellow residents and, perhaps, as fellow citizens. Even those here illegally have basic human rights that must be respected—whatever our other policy decisions. I think it follows that churches should support the work of community groups to rescue migrants in distress, should urge the government to avoid confrontational tactics as far as possible, and should support the enforcement of laws against treating migrant laborers unfairly.

Second, immigration should not be dealt with as a discrete issue, as if it were not related to the issues that lead to forced migration, including desperate poverty, discrimination, and warfare around the world. Debt relief in Africa is an immigration issue—for us. Peace and political stability in Central America are immigration issues—for us. Since 9/11, the immigration debate has been linked to national security. But Christians know that security is never a matter of unilateral defense but involves attentiveness to the injustice that afflicts others.

Third, human community, including this nation, is enriched by the presence of immigrants. Indeed, if scripture is our guide, we will recognize them as potential bearers of blessing, like Abraham's visitors by the oaks of Mamre. I say this as the proud father of an Asian Indian daughter who entered this country, at the age of eleven months, on a green card.

Such considerations lead me, then, to support policies that provide opportunity for undocumented migrants to become lawful permanent residents and, eventually, U.S. citizens; to support reforms of immigration law that reduce the waiting time for separated families to be reunited; to oppose bills that would militarize the border with Mexico or make illegal immigration an aggravated felony. These positions are consistent with those of various member communions of the National Council of Churches and with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. I want to acknowledge, however, that there are considerations which lead faithful Christians to favor more restrictive policies. I will name only two:

The first is the effect of immigration on workers—especially vulnerable, unskilled workers—born in this country. New immigrants are often a threat to the economic advancement of older ones since the influx of workers desperate for jobs tightens labor markets, makes it harder for workers to organize, and helps to keep wages depressed. The presence of such workers, it is argued, benefits employers and consumers, but not the “least” already among us. There are counter-arguments: that immigrant entrepreneurs create jobs for native-born workers...that bringing undocumented workers “out from the shadows” would allow them to bargain for higher wages, thus driving wages up for others.... But it isn't always clear what is best for the common good.

The picture gets even more complex when looked at globally. It is certainly possible to argue that increased migration to the United States will weaken countries of origin and is a threat to the human future since U.S. residents consume more of the earth's resources than those of any other nation. At the very least, this means that the immigration debate should include a call to reduce our habits of excess consumption.

Discussion:

Responding to a question following his presentation, Dr. Kinnamon also shared the following:

“Those who argue for the most lenient immigration policies...will likely contend that the earth belongs to God...and therefore that it's resources should be available to all of its people without border. As they see it, countries like the United States restrict immigration in order to hoard our resources as if those resources were somehow ours and not Gods. This vision is universal, that is it sees the whole of the earth truly interrelated, but it's also individualistic. The world as these people see it is a single community made up of persons who should have free access to the earth's resources wherever they can find it.

“My own vision...is more communal. I value the diverse cultures and communities that make up this world and in which people find identity. To use a religious example, I am part of the whole human family but I recognize particular responsibility for and identity with other Christians, and more particularly still with Disciples of Christ. In the same way, I believe that the government of this country has a right and a responsibility to make the care of U.S. citizens a priority while being sensitive to the whole of God's creation.

“But I certainly respect the more universalistic position. Those who would argue against enforcement of boundaries, in general, would value the intermingling of cultures and peoples. I value the particularity of cultures and peoples, even as I try to break down walls between them. They would see the world as a single community. I see it as a community of communities, each of which has responsibility for

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What God Has Made Clean, We Must not Call Profane: Let's Not Get Too Comfortable with the Familiar

By Dr. Tim Lee

An immigrant from Korea, Tim Lee, is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); he teaches Church History at Brite Divinity School (Texas Christian University) and directs Brite's Asian (Korean) Church Studies Program.

Preface

I delivered the following sermon on August 10, 2006, to an audience gathered at University Christian Church of Berkeley for the opening worship of a North American Pacific/Asian Disciples convocation. Many in the audience were leaders of our church – congregational, regional, and general – and even more were immigrants, mostly from Asia and Pacific Islands – Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, Mongolians, Samoans, and Vietnamese. In the sermon, immigration (or a particular experience of it) is discussed not as the main subject but as an illustration, an illustration that underscores that even procedurally correct laws can be immoral and unchristian – can indiscriminately demean and hurt people – if they fail to recognize the essential humanity of those they are directed against. Lest we forget, an immigrant, documented or undocumented, is a human being, created by God, in the image of God.

—Tim Lee

Text: Acts 10: 9-16

Today's text is an excerpt from that famous narrative about how the Apostle Peter and the Roman centurion Cornelius came to meet each other. Cornelius is not a Jew, yet he is a devout believer of God. One day, he has a vision in which an angel tells him that his devotion has so impressed God that God wants to do something for him, and tells him to send messengers to Peter to have him come over to Cornelius's house. While the messengers are on their way, Peter also experiences a vision – a strange one in which he sees cows, hogs, lizards, and a bunch of other animals thrown together in a huge sheet that moves up and down in the air three times, with a voice telling him he should eat all those animals, with Peter himself protesting he would never eat anything as profane as a lizard, and finally with the voice saying: "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." (v. 15)

Even as Peter is trying to puzzle out this vision, he is led by the Spirit to meet Cornelius's messengers, who direct him to their master's house. "On Peter's arrival," scripture tells us, "Cornelius . . . falling at his feet, worshiped him..." causing an alarmed Peter to say, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." Peter went on to say, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean." (v. 28) Thereafter, Peter preached about Jesus Christ, in the course of which "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word," (v. 44) and baptized Cornelius and his household in the name of Jesus Christ.

Let's think about Peter's vision a little bit. The crucial part, I think, is where God tells Peter to eat the animals and he protests. Peter protests because he thinks of himself as a devout Jew – and devout Jews didn't eat just any animal! Chickens and cows, yes; but hogs and lizards? – no way! Only those



animals allowed by the dietary law would he eat. Peter was puzzled because he didn't get the symbolism of it all. What did those hogs and lizards stand for? Why would God want him to break a familiar routine that he thought was so important? But by the time he arrived at Cornelius's house, he had everything figured out. The animals stood for people of different races, nations, ethnicities, and other kinds of groupings; Peter's eating of them symbolized his fellowshiping with them. In other words, eating exotic animals like lizards meant fellowshiping with exotic people like...well...Koreans!...or how about Anglo-Italian-Polish-Swedish Americans!

My dictionary defines exotic as "intriguingly unusual or different." Normally, we are conservative about dealing with things different or unfamiliar – unfamiliar food, stocks, people. To an extent, such a disposition is reasonable because it enhances our chances of survival. But problems occur when we get too comfortable with the familiar, to the extent we lose the awareness that there are other ways of doing basically the same thing that are just as valid as ours. White bread and burrito may be natural food to folk in Ft. Worth, Texas, where I currently live, but rice and kimchee are more natural to folk in Korea Town, Los Angeles. But, in the end, they both accomplish basically the same thing, feeding the hungry stomach. When we lose the awareness that there are diverse ways of doing basically the same thing, we run the risk of falling into the us-versus-them kind of thinking where what is comfortable and familiar to us is transmuted into something natural and eternally true – while what is different to us is transmuted into something abnormal and essentially inferior. We, in short, run the risk of calling people or things profane even when they come clean off God's hands.

More specifically, when we become overly comfortable with the familiar, we tend to make two kinds of blunders. One is that we are likely to lump together everyone and everything that is different from us under one catchall category called the "other." This otherizing tendency – an extreme example of which is to call people who are different from us an "evil empire" or "axis of evil" – may bring some simplistic order to our own minds but hinders our ability to truly understand other people or to appreciate the fact that they themselves may be very diverse. This blunder hinders us from entertaining the notion that each of these individuals and peoples might have a unique history, a special culture, and unanticipated gifts.

One of my favorite Disciples is Joe Nagano, a cheerful Japanese-American who lives in Los Angeles. He once told me this joke. It's such a good joke that I want you to hear it too. He said he had heard it from a rabbi, so it has to be kosher. Bear with me.

A Korean man was riding in a New York subway train. At a station stop, he was joined by a Jewish man. As the train was in transit, the Jew, for some reason, kept eyeballing the Korean; he then walked up to the guy and socked him in the face, shouting, "That's for Pearl Harbor, you Jap!" Bewildered, the Korean looked up and protested, "But I am a Korean." To which the Jew replied, "Ah, what's the difference: Koreans, Japanese, Chinese – they're all the same!" When the Jew returned to his seat, the Korean regained his composure and now he began eyeballing the Jew. Before long, he too got up, walked up to the Jew, and socked him in the face, saying, "That's for Titanic!" The Jew got befuddled and protested, "Titanic . . . what does that have to do with me!" The Korean retorted, "Ah, what's the difference: Goldberg, Spielberg, iceberg – they are all the same!"

You are right to laugh – this is a very funny joke. But once we've finished laughing, it would pay to reflect on it a little bit. Would we be laughing if we were at the receiving end of a punch? Would we be laughing if we were one of those 120,000 Americans who during the Second World War were forced to suffer internment simply because they were of an unfamiliar ancestry – in this case Japanese? One of those "unfamiliar" people was David Kagiwada, whom we

know so well as a founder of the North American Pacific/Asian Disciples (NAPAD). I could easily imagine a bewildered David protesting when he was told by soldiers to pack up his belongings and head for the camp, “but we are Japanese-Americans,” only to be told, “Ah, what’s the difference!” We wouldn’t be laughing if we were Sikhs and just because we wore a turban, we got lumped up with Osama Bin Laden and found ourselves literally at the receiving end of a punch. In my flight here from Fort Worth, I read an article in *USA Today* about how a lot of Muslim Americans have been suffering psychological problems since September 11, 2001, because of anti-Muslim prejudices. There was one particular case of an American-born Muslim man who received an e-mail from his co-worker that began “Dear Terrorist.” Imagine getting an e-mail like that!

The second blunder we make when we become too comfortable with the familiar is really the flip side of the first blunder. In the first blunder we lump together all those people and things that are different from us and demean them. In the second blunder, we make ourselves, or that which is familiar to us, the norm of what is good and beautiful – and usually end up looking quite bad and ugly. Take for example, skin color. There is no getting around the fact that our skin color – our physical appearance – is familiar to us. That in itself is not a problem. The problem occurs when we get too comfortable with our skin color – our own family, our own culture, our own gender, our own sexual orientation – to the extent that we make it normative for all humanity. We know this problem all too well, and it comes with different labels: racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and homophobia. But whatever we call it, we know it is wrong, because it forces us to call profane what God has made clean.

We are well aware of racism’s harmful effects – how it poisons everything it touches. I already alluded to the harmful effects it had on Japanese-American Disciples. There is another NAPAD group that was equally hurt by racism – the Chinese-American Disciples – and theirs is a story that has rarely been told.

A large majority of Disciples are Euro-Americans, and most of our white brothers and sisters know very little about Asians in their midst. Those who do know something about us tend to think we are some kind of Johnny-come-latelies, brought in by the latest 747s that landed at LAX airport. The truth of the matter is that Asians have been part of the Disciples for over a hundred years – at least since 1897 when the Christian Women’s Board of Missions (CWBM) helped to found a Disciples community among the Chinese in Portland, Oregon. This community grew to be a full-blown church holding weekly worship, Sunday schools, and night classes. They were led by Chinese themselves, lay and ordained. Two of the leaders were graduates of Drake College, which was a Disciples institution back then. In 1907, CWBM established another Chinese “mission” in San Francisco, called the Chinese Christian Institute. There Chinese Christians, with the help of the missionary society, conducted church services, Bible schools, and night classes teaching English. They also ran day school for Chinese children, held classes on music and home economics, as well as house-to-house work programs for girls and women.

These two communities were never very large. Neither church’s adult membership seems to have gone beyond one hundred, although Sunday school enrollment at the Chinese Christian Institute usually numbered around one hundred fifty. Nonetheless what is important is that these two churches served vital needs of their respective communities. Also the memberships were small not for want of evangelistic zeal on the part of the Chinese. The main problem was a racism that was rampant against Chinese – that shut off Chinese immigration and harried many Chinese who were already in the country out of it.

You may be aware that Chinese were encouraged to immigrate to the United States till about the 1870s, mainly because the country needed their cheap labor, especially to build the transcontinental railroad. In 1868, Congress even passed a treaty (Burlington Treaty) that guaranteed Chinese immigration. But after the railroad was completed (1869), Chinese were seen as competitors by white laborers and subjected to lynching and discriminatory laws. Beginning in 1880 a series of Chinese Exclusion Acts were passed, including an act passed in 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act) that made it virtually impossible for Chinese and other Asians to immigrate to the United States. Speaking in support of this act, Senator Ellison DuRant Smith of South Carolina made the following remark that illustrates what I mean by the danger of becoming too comfortable with the familiar. He said:

Thank God we have in America perhaps the largest percentage of any country in the world of the pure, unadulterated Anglo-Saxon stock; certainly the greatest of any nation in the Nordic breed. It is for the preservation of that splendid stock that has characterized us that I would make this not an asylum for the oppressed of all countries, but a country to assimilate and perfect that splendid type of manhood that has made America the foremost Nation in her progress and in her power, and yet the youngest of all the nation. . . . without offense, but with regard to the salvation of our own, let us shut the door and assimilate what we have, and let us breed pure American citizens and develop our own American resources. (Speech by Ellison DuRant Smith, April 9, 1924, Congressional Record, 68th)

With racist rhetoric like this prevailing even in halls of Congress, you may not be surprised to learn that in the same year that this act was passed – 1924 – the Chinese Disciples church in Portland (and most likely San Francisco’s Chinese Christian Institute) was shut down. Was it a mere coincidence? I have my doubts. Be that as it may, what is certain is that after the closure of those churches in Portland and San Francisco, Disciples would not have another Chinese church for a long time – not until 1990 when First Chinese Christian Church (DOC) was founded in Alhambra, California. What God has made clean, we must not call profane!

Though the closure of the Chinese churches was deplorable, the picture wasn’t entirely bleak even back then. Not long after the Chinese churches were closed, another Asian community – Filipinos – came to the attention of some Anglo Disciples. In 1933, these Anglos and Filipinos worked together to establish **Filipino** Christian Church (DOC) in Los Angeles. A few years ago I had the privilege to briefly serve this church as interim pulpit minister and in the process learned some of its history. What I learned was extremely encouraging. From the outset, the Anglos did not seek to make the church in their image but helped it become a Filipino Christian Church. And what a marvelous job they and the Filipinos have done! In its seventy plus years of history, Filipino Christian Church has ministered not only to spiritual needs of Filipino Christians but also social needs of thousands of Filipino immigrants in Los Angeles. The church had become such an important part of the Filipino community that in 1998 the City of Los Angeles declared its buildings a historical-cultural monument. On top of all that, the church has produced some of the most loyal Disciples you will find anywhere, such as the late Royal Morales, a fiery civil rights leader, and Patricia (Cisa) Payuyo, who served as the First Vice Moderator of the General Assembly in the past two years. What God has made clean, we must not call profane!

When I was in seminary I had to take a preaching class, and in that class my classmates and I took turns preaching to the class. One day, it was Steve’s turn. Steve was a preacher’s kid and must have been in his late twenties. He was a veteran, a veteran of the Gulf War – the first Iraq War – which, as you know, took place in 1991. He preached about an experience he had in that war. Steve was captain in some kind of special unit, and one day he and his men were sent to

take an enemy territory. When he arrived there, however, he found that the battle had already been fought and won – by the Air Force. Iraqi debris was everywhere – bombed out tanks, some of them still smoldering, and dead bodies, broken and strewn all over. Among the debris were some Iraqi soldiers that had been spared – all dazed and traumatized, waiting to be captured. As Steve and his men rounded them up, one of them approached him and asked for permission to do something. He asked that he be allowed to pray – pray for his friends who had perished in the bombing. A strange request, Steve thought, but like a good preacher's kid, he granted the wish. The man then unfurled a prayer mat on the sand, and for the next thirty minutes, in the midst of the horrific ruins, he gave the most heartfelt prayer Steve had ever heard – beseeching Allah, calling forth the names of his slain friends. Witnessing this prayer, Steve said he was deeply moved. He felt he was in the presence of God, and felt a profound bond between him and the man who was supposed to have been his enemy, who was supposed to have been so profane. Just as St. Peter, in the presence of God, was able to see an essential commonness between him and the Roman centurion who was supposed to have been profane, Steve, in the presence of God, was able to see a similarity between him and the Iraqi soldier, and this similarity dwarfed whatever difference that may have existed between them.

Seeking similarities between us and those who are different from us, seeing the clean hand of God in all that God has created, even if that means experiencing discomfort, is one of the things we are called to do as Christians. And only if we can do that, will it be possible for use to reconcile in Christ. What God has made clean, we must never call profane!

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The Prophetic Call to a Healthy Community And Our Response to Immigration

By Rev. Daisy L. Machado, Ph.D.

An immigrant from Cuba, Daisy Machado, is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); she is the Professor of Church History at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

Preface

This theological reflection was presented to the Central Kentucky Council on Peace and Justice at their Annual Dinner and Fair on February 18, 2007. The biblical call is for a healthy community able to offer hospitality to the sojourner, to the immigrant, to the stranger and the best way to express that hospitality is by helping to create a society that honors justice, mercy, and compassion.

- Daisy Machado

The issue at hand is immigration and there is much to be said about this hotly debated reality. From the Minutemen on the southern U.S./Mexico border to lawmakers to activists to the citizen on the street to the immigrants themselves, the voices are many and the call for a response is urgently needed. What I want to share with you today is one way to look at the issue of immigration from my social location which means that I cannot speak in any other way than as a Christian minister, as a church historian, as an educator and also as an immigrant. My parents and I are part of that history of immigration that is core to the soul of this country yet the reality of immigration has been and continues to be one that evokes a sense of ambivalence that has permeated this nation's relations with its immigrant arrivals. So the question becomes, how can we make it different in the 21st century? I will attempt to provide a response by first asking what I think are two very basic and important questions: 1) What has Christianity to say about the immigrant, and, 2) What theological insight and guidance can the Christian community lift up to the nations who receive that never ending flow of human lives?

I begin with a very brief examination of the words of the prophet Zechariah who joined the prophetic tradition of Israel in trying to provide an answer to the questions: What makes your faith special? What is it about your faith (theology) that should claim my loyalty? Ever since the prophets first emerged in ancient Israel, early Judaism with its monotheistic focus found itself competing with a myriad of other religions. And in seeking to respond to the two pivotal questions I have posed — what makes your faith special, and, what is it about your faith (theology) that should claim my loyalty — the prophets presented the Israelites some foundational teachings in order to help them understand how they could provide their neighbors with a model for living that would serve as a beacon in the midst of the harsh realities of their time and place — poverty, economic exploitation and oppression, war, unjust rulers, and the reality of the immigration of people from land to land seeking some hope for a better life.

Often folks today think that the problems related to the global movement of people is a new problem and especially for those who live in the southwestern borderlands of this country, these folks see the problem specifically related to Mexico and nations to the south. However, Robert P. Carroll, writing in the *Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*, reminds us that:



The grand narratives, even the metanarrative itself of the Bible are about deportations, little and large, real and symbolic, and the constant hope of return, of restoration, of homecoming... the whole Bible itself may well be regarded as the production of such diasporic experiences. (p. 103)

It is important to frame the issue of immigration within this broader context of the Bible itself as a metanarrative not only about immigration (physical and spiritual) but more importantly about the hope of restoration — whether that hope be the actual return of the immigrant to her/his homeland or the ability of that immigrant to truly find a new home, a new place of welcome, safety, and flourishing. By placing immigration within this more encompassing biblical understanding we are also saying that immigration is not a criminal act that undermines our national security, as our current immigration policy holds. Instead we see that immigrants are in reality an uprooted people who leave their countries because they must, not because they simply wake up one morning with a desire to become “illegal,” undocumented, criminals. No decision to leave one’s nation is done easily. To leave behind all that is familiar, to rip out the roots sown by those who loved us and helped to shape us in order to migrate, is a decision of great emotional and spiritual consequence.

Within the prophetic writings, there was a particular concern to respond to the questions of why the faith of Israel had something distinctive to offer humanity. The prophet Zechariah, whose writings I am using, lived in the sixth century BCE, approximately 520-518. His teachings focus on specific themes that are developed in the first eight chapters of the Book of Zechariah. However, Zechariah also focuses on three additional themes that are common to the other teachings of the Hebrew Bible and these are: 1) poverty, 2) the stranger, and, 3) the widow and the orphan. And so we find in verses 9, 10 of chapter 7 the following teaching: “Administer justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.”

However immediately following this teaching in verses 11, 12 of the same chapter Zechariah proclaims the following: “But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen...” These words represent a warning against the attitude the post-exilic community had adopted in regards to the teachings given to them by the prophets. Zechariah knew that if the Israelites were to create a society that would stand-out from those of the neighboring nations, that if they were to truly become the people who lived in obedience to the divine mandates, they could not continue to remain impassive to the teachings that had the power to make their community a healthy community, one capable of being a signpost for those seeking hope and comfort.

For the prophet, the three characteristics of the healthy community that lives in obedience to the divine vision for humanity are justice, mercy, and compassion and we find these three repeated in the Epistle of James 1:27 where they are now presented to the newly emerging Christian community. For the Jewish prophet, like for the writer of the Christian epistle, these are not abstract words filled with philosophical meaning but instead represent an ethical worldview that is intended to be practiced, to be lived out. Justice, mercy, and compassion are the concrete responses of the community that stands in covenant with God and wishes to provide the broken world we live in with hope and healing, justice, mercy and compassion, the basic characteristics of a healthy and vigorous human community.

Now you and I are about the work of helping to build and sustain healthy communities. This is a challenge you and I share — I do so in my work as a seminary professor and you do so as activists who do hands on work with the very communities I am describing to you. So the

question is how do we continue to promote and lift up the vision presented to us by the prophet in regards to the fundamental characteristics of a healthy community? What has been our national response to the three groups clearly identified in the Bible as those who need special care and concern and protection? Where do our communities stand in regards to the aliens/strangers in our midst? How is it that fear can make us so unwelcoming of those who like me or you or our parents and grandparents left their nations to seek a better life for themselves and their loved ones? I think our work begins by debunking the bad theology that is so easily found in our congregations and so easily exploited by those in political power.

We begin by unmasking the ineffectual mentality of the do-gooder that permeates what passes for charity in this country. The works of mercy require more than a food basket or donations to Goodwill. The works of mercy require risk taking because they require that the person reaching out in justice, compassion and mercy stand "with" and not only "for" the one who has been forgotten, who is vulnerable, who has been cast aside by society. The works of mercy reveal our own need for mercy, our own limitations, our own poverty of spirit.¹ Such revelation is more often than not frightening and something we would rather not deal with. That is why it is so much simpler to remain at the do-gooder level. However that is not what the prophet wanted from the people and this is certainly not what the Gospel is about.

I want to lift up how in my faith tradition, Jesus the Christ, who was also an immigrant in many senses of the word, and how he de-centers the center, those places of power and prestige and wealth, and now focuses on those who have been left-out, excluded, de-valued, pushed aside, ignored, dismissed. To do the work of justice, mercy, and compassion involves hospitality and healing. To seek to live as a healthy community is "an invitation into an interesting life, into an unleashing of one's inner power, into authentic community, into the possibility of fulfillment in an vacuous society."² And even more than that, it is about deep and abiding love, love that is there for the long haul, it is about a deep faith that will not be easily frightened or dismayed.

And in this summon to do justice and show compassion, to live with a sense of mercy and purpose what we discover is often a heartbreaking task.

Dorothy Day spoke of the "harsh and dreadful love" demanded of her in her "long loneliness" of struggle for justice and devotion to the poor. No pursuit of justice is undertaken without sacrifice, risk, and loss. A cloud of emotional heaviness may descend. Now and again the temptation surfaces to give up, to abandon the struggle, to seek instead a life of normalcy, ease, and security for oneself and one's family. After all, one has to contend with the tentative nature of any "victories" in the public arena and the obdurate nature of systemic evil. Amidst such realities, what keeps one going...? The lament of Jeremiah puts it this way: "O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed....(Jer. 20:7-9)³

¹ Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice, Congregations and Community Organizing* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 19.

² Jacobsen, p. 96.

³ Jacobsen, p. 96.

Called to the deed, that is our praxis, that is the oxygen of our work on behalf of peace and justice. To say yes to the call made to us is to affirm life, it is to be healed and empowered, it is to be released from fear so that when we come to that woman, child, or man who stands before us as stranger/alien/other we will not look away, we will not pass judgment, we will take the risk and make ourselves vulnerable by reaching out. It means that we will be willing to share not because we give from what is left over but because we give of our best, of what is most precious to us. When we respond to this call to justice, mercy, and compassion we will be able to enter into new depths of sharing, mutual concern. We will be made hungry for the experience of living in a true community that shatters the privatistic, insular and individualistic notions of community where homogeneity is the rule and which I believe have the final result of making us incapable of true hospitality. From my perspective the theological response to this call is to learn to live in true solidarity. And what is solidarity? Latin American theologian Jon Sobrino defines solidarity as closeness, support, and defense of the weak. He says: "Solidarity is the tenderness of peoples."⁴ Listen to this definition one more time: "Solidarity is the tenderness of peoples." To think of tenderness as a key component of our praxis, of our call as responsible citizens, is one of the challenges we must take on if we are to respond concretely to the realities of the world we live in. And one of the greatest challenges to our living lives of tenderness is the reality of immigration.

We are called to be agents of change. We are called to be examples of empathy and compassion. We are called to see ourselves in the faces of those who cross our borders seeking life, seeking shelter, seeking safety, and offer them hospitality and healing. I believe that all of us possess the gifts needed to help our communities to rediscover how they can respond to the immigrants around us and to offer an alternative way of responding to those who fear and reject the immigrant. We need to challenge the idea that immigrants are criminals first and human beings second. We need to see beyond the legal arguments and seek to understand the forces that create immigration. We must refuse to accept the easy claims that only talk about immigration in light of economic loss and gains. We must stand firm and claim the importance of justice, mercy, and compassion. It does not matter that you are or are not Christian or even religious. The prophet's call to a healthy community is ultimately about a social ethic that shapes and guides how we conduct our lives as citizens of a nation and how we respond to those who live in difference whether due to poverty, race, gender, or country of origin.

Let me share with you a *New York Times* Editorial called "They are America" (Sunday, February 18, 2007):

Almost a year ago, hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers and their families slipped out from the shadows of American life and walked boldly in daylight through Los Angeles, Washington, Chicago, New York and other cities. "We Are America," their banners cried. The crowds, determined but peaceful, swelled into an immense sea. The nation was momentarily stunned. A lot has happened since then. The country has summoned great energy to confront the immigration problem, but most of it has been misplaced, crudely and unevenly applied. It seeks not to solve the conundrum of a broken immigration system, but to subdue, in a million ways, the vulnerable men and women who are part of it. Government at all levels is working to keep unwanted immigrants in their place - on the other side of the border, in detention or in fear, toiling silently in the

⁴ Jon Sobrino, "Redeeming Globalization through its Victims," in *Concilium 2001/5, Globalization and its Victims*, Jon Sobrino & Felix Wilfred, eds. (London: SCM Press, 2001), p. 111.

underground economy without recourse to the laws and protections the native-born expect.

*The overwhelming impulse has been to get tough, and tough we have gotten: **Border enforcement.** What little the last Congress did about immigration was focused on appeasing hard-line conservatives by appearing to seal the border. President Bush's new budget continues that approach, seeking 3,000 more Border Patrol officers and another \$1 billion for a 700-mile fence, adding to the billions spent to militarize the border since the 1990s.*

***Federal raids.** In December, federal agents stormed a half-dozen Swift Meat packing plants, rounding up hundreds of suspected illegal immigrants and exposing the secret that is no secret: America's dirtiest, hardest jobs are done by people too desperate to shun them and too afraid to complain....*

***The web of suspicion.** The Justice Department wants to expand routine DNA collection to include detained illegal immigrants, creating a vast new database that will sweep up hundreds of thousands of innocent people....*

***The rise of hate.** The Anti-Defamation League, acutely sensitive to the presence of intolerance, has detected an increase in Ku Klux Klan activity around the country, much of it focused on hatred of new immigrants....*

And then the writer of this editorial ends with this statement:

Enforcement of laws cannot be ignored. Punish immigrants who enter illegally, make them pay back taxes and fines, restrict their ability to get work through deceit and false identities. But open a path to their full inclusion in the life of this country.

The alternative - the path of immigrant exploitation, of harassment without hope - will only repeat the ways the country has shamed itself at countless points in its history.

The bottom line is that for a nation that has so easily claimed Christian roots and Christian values, the reality of immigration has done little to show how these roots and values can function. As the editorial writer clearly says, this country continues to "shame itself" in how its current reaction to immigration and to the failure of its immigration system and national policy. Yet we do not have to seek blindly for a way to respond, the prophets of old have given us a response: to show compassion, to extend mercy, to be loyal to our beliefs and ethical values, and to live in hope. The world is waiting to hear a word of hope, a word of solace, a word of encouragement, a word of invitation to community, a word of welcome. May we continue to answer God's call to collaboration and continue our work of justice, loyalty and compassion on behalf of the immigrants who are the most vulnerable.

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WCC Theological Reflection on Migration

By Jennifer Riggs

The Director of the Refugee and Immigration Ministries program in Disciples Home Missions, Jennifer Riggs, is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); she has served for 28 years seeking to educate congregations on refugee and immigration issues, to involve congregations in refugee resettlement, to assist congregations with ministries to persons with immigration problems, to involve congregations in meeting the needs of refugees around the world, to enable Disciples advocacy on behalf of refugees and immigrants.

Preface

At the end of November 2007, I had the opportunity to participate in an experimental process being implemented by the World Council of Churches, called Platforms for Theological Reflection and Analysis. The first of those platforms focused on issues of migration. I spent four days with about 30 other persons from Protestant and Orthodox churches around the world reflecting from a theological perspective on case studies and our own experience with migrants. For a good portion of the time, we divided into three groups for discussion under the themes of:

- *Migration, God and Place;*
- *Migration, God and Humanity; and*
- *Migration, God and the Church.*

The thoughts and questions shared here come from those conversations and from papers shared with the platform from around the world. What is shared here is not meant to be seen as a unified, systematic look at the issue of migration from a theological perspective. It is simply pieces of conversation gathered together to provoke further conversation. The intent of the platform was not to produce any official documents but rather to bring people together from around the world to have these conversations in the hopes that that conversation would spread throughout the world.

By participating in this “Welcoming the World to our Doorstep” process you are extending that platform into your own community and furthering the theological discussions that are happening globally.

If you wish to read the papers submitted for the platform, you will find some of them at <http://www.oikoumene.org/?id=4244>.

—Jennifer Riggs

Migration, God and Place

Whose land is it? If the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, doesn't that challenge the idea of nation states having authority over the land? Who owns the land? Who, therefore, owns the nation state? What kind of theology controls our behavior when it comes to the land? Do we have a theology of place? Doesn't our faith challenge a theology of place?

Is land a gift or a right? Is it to be held in common for the benefit of all or to be an exclusive possession? If land is a symbol of God's creativity and generosity, isn't the emphasis on interdependence and inclusiveness in God's creation and, therefore, in the land God created?



People need a sense of place, a sense of home. But is that necessarily a physical location? Aren't we a people who belong not to any particular country but to a heavenly city? Aren't we a pilgrim people passing

through this world – sojourners seeking our home in God? Our attitude to the land will be different if we feel we are passing through, rather than feeling settled and claiming the land for ourselves to have dominion over it. Where are our hearts? Are they committed to the land/nation or to living the way God wants us to live?

Why are we obsessed with security? Land is often seen as the basis of economic and personal security, and boundaries are secured against perceived or real threats to that security. What happens when human security is sought in land, wealth, possessions, status, power or other human institutions and when the desire for security is demonstrated in the refusal to share with others? Doesn't it result in migration, unjust immigration laws, and oppressive treatment of migrants? That lack of sharing with others is challenged by Christian faith.

As children we loved the game of musical chairs. We still play that game, grabbing up that which we think we need and forcing others to go without. The Christian community should be able to bring a powerful counter-cultural challenge to the false security of wealth/land because it is a community that transcends place? Or have churches bought into the individuality of society (me and my family first)? Have churches compromised their ability to speak truth to power by their support of structures of power and dominance, such as in their allegiance to nation states? Has the church chosen to stand on the side of nation states and the need for borders?

It is interesting that when the churches of the world gather together in WCC meetings we identify ourselves by our country, not as common followers of Christ. Around the world, we organize churches into national councils. Does our sense of being in the household of God have any priority over our nationality?

In our search for security, is it only the security of the country receiving migrants that we care about? What about the security of the arriving people? What about the insecurity that caused them to migrate? Is it idolatry when we set nations as the determining factors in benefits and material goods that people receive? Are the rights of the nation only for the citizens of the nation, or are the rights of the nation for the benefit of all persons within and beyond the nation?

In the Old Testament, land played a very important role. God formed man from the dust of the earth and gave man the responsibility of caring for the land. When Cain and Able fought over the land, the land cried out for justice. By the time of the Exodus the emphasis was on the land as a promised gift from God, even though the indigenous people who were on the land suffered as the Israelites took over the land. Was it God's will that the conquests happened? Did God set the stage for all the times throughout history when we have fought over the land?

If God is everywhere and our home is in God (so that our home is everywhere), why do we need to fight for land? Jesus had no where to lay his head on this earth, and if we are to follow Jesus is not our home also no where on this earth? Jesus crossed a border fleeing to safety in Egypt. Are we to regard borders as sacrosanct?

Did not the first Christians pool their possessions and punish those who held something back? In the New Testament the focus changed from the land to the relationship of people. Jesus focused on landless experience with a shift from a theology of victors of place to a theology of people living in human relationship.

Land is also a symbol of culture and identity, including language, social structures and norms. Migrants and more settled populations alike need to remember their own cultural identity and respect that of others. However, cultures often become falsely closed, viewed as possessions

to be defended against “alien” influences, impervious to the challenges of faith, persisting in unjust social norms that represent the false security that leads people away from God. Shouldn’t culture, also, be understood as a common human inheritance, given by God to sustain and nurture all people?

A settled state of being is often taken as normative. Therefore, migrants are seen as problematic, whatever problems they are felt to create or actually suffer. A fixedness of mind, spirit and location may lead to a self-sufficiency that can separate us from God. Has Christianity bought into the theology of empire? Has Christianity failed to confront the powers that cause suffering? Have we failed to organize support of Christians suffering in the rest of the world? We make statements and pass resolutions, but we don’t challenge the idolatry of nation states. If it is true that when one suffers, all suffer, shouldn’t we be about the elimination of the suffering of others?

Migration, God and Humanity

The fact that humans are made in the image of God raises questions about how we can see the humanity of others and not just presume that God’s image is what we see in the mirror. Shouldn’t a theological understanding of our common humanity lead us to value one another even when others try to use differences to divide us? Shouldn’t it also lead to a sense of interdependency? We are God’s gift to each other. We are the family of God. Our common humanity calls us to celebrate diversity. If we see the other as abnormal, don’t we deny part of our own humanity?

Is there an interconnection between our relationship with God and our attitudes, relationships, and behavior towards other people, whereby the quality of the one is always determined by the quality of the other? Or is our relationship with God such an exclusive personal experience that other humans play no part in it? A preoccupation in parts of the church with the “individual” may lead to a loss of our common identity as humans under God. Isn’t the “we and them” kind of thinking a false reality that we live in? Doesn’t the reality of God’s creation call us to focus on “all of us?”

What is God’s will for people? Is it possible that people are on the move because God wants people to intermix and come into contact with each other, to broaden their understanding of the whole family of God? Is it possible that migration to our country is God’s way of forcing us to be a more open and receptive people? If so, why do so many people suffer exploitation in the new land? Why does part of the family of God hurt another part of the family of God? We in the church tend to accept the crises that go on around the world and blindly go on about our daily lives. Won’t our failure to address the root causes of migration make it an issue forever? Don’t Christians have a responsibility to address the root causes?

“Remembering” can be an important method of being in touch with our common humanity. Don’t all of us have migrant roots? Remembering our roots can help us relate to those who are uprooted today. As people of faith, our migrant roots go all the way back to the Bible and the movement of God’s people throughout the Biblical stories. If we look at scripture through the eyes of a migrant, won’t we be better able to more clearly see the God of all creation? Won’t it help us realize that we don’t belong to a place, but to a family – the family of God? One of the gifts migrants bring us is an understanding that God is in the movement – not in the stability. Migrants are not abnormal; the settled are the abnormal. Migration is normative for the world God created and moves among today.

Every human being lives in the ambiguity of God's creation. Human life is constantly touched both by its goodness as well as by suffering. All excluded groups have certain experiences in common such as: poverty, suffering, marginalization, oppression, victimization, demonization, humiliation, rejection, violence, and discrimination. But have you noticed that they also have hope – in the form of resistance, celebration, solidarity, or a vision of a new society? The faith of migrants often grows on the move as they have an experience of the broader community. Those who suffer can build up in themselves a way of transforming that suffering so they overcome it. It is these experiences of hope that can inform new directions for the pursuit of just and inclusive communities. Isn't that a gift that migrants bring to the settled – a better awareness of hope and a new energy to be about efforts to form just and inclusive communities?

Isn't resistance to injustice, exclusion, discrimination, and derision as valid a form of spirituality as is piety? Resistance may take the form of subversive action in opposition to powers that oppress. It can also result in celebration of life in spite of the oppressors. Isn't grace the experience of God's love that inspires, directs and empowers the excluded to envision and work for transformation.

If one member of the body suffers, don't all suffer? Doesn't that mean it is a sin to participate in exclusion? Many persons involved in acts of exclusion tend to find fault with those who are excluded, rather than finding fault with the structures, culture, norms, beliefs, etc. which exclude them. Isn't each person of value because they are a creation of a loving God? Isn't love of God with all your heart, soul, and strength and love of neighbor as yourself the way to life in abundance? All humans have the capacity to give and receive love, though this potential is not always realized in personal relationships or in churches. How this love is expressed will vary in each context, but isn't community the context for the expression of this love "which binds everything together in perfect harmony"?

When it comes to God and humanity, the God of the Old Testament does not appear to be the same in dealing with humanity as does the God of the New Testament. The God of the Old Testament is the giver of the law, but law gets used in oppressive ways by those in power. In the New Testament, however, the church focused on an understanding of Christ as the broken Jesus on the cross and the one who integrates the broken creation in the resurrection. Doesn't that focus lead to an understanding that Christ took upon himself the identities of those who are excluded and exploited? Doesn't that understanding of Christ expose the life-denying tendencies of certain cultures and structures that govern human relationships? The body of Christ suffers and longs for restitution and healing of the creation with childbirth pains because of the many ways that people exclude one another. Isn't Jesus the truest image of an inclusive God? God is always more generous, more inclusive and more mobile than we are.

Migration, God and Church

What makes churches different from the rest of society when it comes to issues of migration? Don't churches have a religious mandate that should inform their attitudes and response? Doesn't that mandate include:

- Respect for human dignity and rights;
- Love of neighbors;
- Protection of the vulnerable;
- Human beings as "citizens of the household of God;"
- Respect for conviction of others (since only God has the whole truth); and

- The universality of the Church?

Are there other things that make up that religious mandate concerning migrants?

Of course, the first step for the church is always to provide welcome. This first step is not always easy in today's world, but isn't it essential if we are to live out our faith? Didn't Jesus say welcome the stranger or "go away into eternal punishment"?

The provision of a welcome is the basic element of the gospel call. However, it can be argued that it is not enough just to focus on how churches can receive and welcome migrants. After all, this is often understood as assimilating them into the status quo of what our society already looks like. Isn't the gospel mandate to do more than just provide a welcome? Isn't migration a challenge to the churches to change to become what the gospel calls us to be – the Church universal? Migration challenges the church in the way it does and lives out theology, in respect to:

- The Body of Christ – Shouldn't migrants and settled Christians complement one another in the body rather than worshipping in separated communities? Does the presence of migrants enable a better understanding of brokenness and wholeness? Does the presence of migrants present a sign of the embracing of all humanity by the church?
- Mission – Don't migrants bring a renewal of the missionary vocation of the local church, not only having a sense of mission towards migrants but in receiving what they bring? By welcoming migrant pastors aren't we receiving missionaries?
- Relating to people of other faiths and ideologies – Don't migrants help churches encounter other faith communities and understand the nature of otherness, both the otherness of people and the otherness of God? Doesn't our understanding of God become less parochial when we come face-to-face with persons of other faiths who also worship God?
- Pilgrimage – Don't migrants help churches see themselves as pilgrim communities, being on the move and ready to change? Doesn't ministry with migrants challenge self-understandings of churches which see themselves as unchanging institutions?
- Baptism and identity – Don't migrants help us develop a concept of identity linked to baptism into Christ rather than identity linked to location or culture? Don't migrants help churches become aware of the risk of being closed entities with a static identity, instead of an identity marked by openness to otherness, openness to others who have also been washed by waters of faith?
- Eucharist – Aren't we all part of a vulnerable humanity in need of Christ's healing that comes through Christ's broken and poured out body? Didn't the first Eucharist take place in a borrowed room with all the temporariness that implies? Outside Christ there is nothing secure or stable on which we may rely.

The challenge of theological reflection on migration for the churches is not how to offer a Christian justification for a humanitarian response to those who suffer, but how to become communities which do not support the conditions that create migration and which are open to that which God gives them through welcoming migrants. How can the churches, who sometimes aren't even interested in a humanitarian response of welcome, be assisted in receiving the gifts from God that migrants bring and be proactive in addressing the root causes of migration?

Besides the need of churches to live out their religious identity, migrants also need to express and live out their religious identity. Their religious identity can be a tool they use for stabilization and avoiding marginalization. The loss of religious identity can lead to the loss of ethical values,

and those migrants will be even more disoriented and uprooted in the host society. This applies to migrants of all faiths. But particular issues arise when migrants have the same religion as a church in their host country. Isn't there a spiritual link with important theological implications for migrants and churches of the same religion? Aren't these migrants equal partners in the denomination with equal rights and duties, rather than guests? Isn't partnership and empowerment very different from patronizing assistance? How do we welcome people not only to our doorsteps but also into the power of the church, into leadership? How do we allow them to become more than just cultural entertainment for church dinners? How do we allow them to become more than just the recipients of our generous benevolence?

Scripture recognizes the reality of migration throughout the Old and New Testament. But haven't you seen people use scripture in order to justify rejection, oppression, and eternal condemnation on those that are deemed to be outsiders? The Bible contains stories of conquest and victory, displacement and victimization, light and dark. There are words of praise and lament, hope and despair, honesty and deceit, release and condemnation. We use scripture to view the word of God, but if we favor the writings of the victors and associate ourselves with those in power won't we use scripture against migrants? The people of God in the Old Testament had a tradition that emphasized hospitality towards strangers whom they encountered, but at the same time circumstances sometimes led them to exterminate their enemies, those they felt were opposed to the wishes of the God they worshipped.

It is easy to fall into that same kind of trap of using scripture to reinforce our beliefs today. With passports and credit cards in our pockets, we tend to take for granted the choices we are privileged to have. If we begin with ourselves and our own story we will more than likely proclaim a "god" made in our own image, rather than the God who stands with the oppressed and weeps at injustice. We will more likely stand against those who are not like us and blame those who are different, simply for being different. Blame has always been an excuse to avoid responsibility to be open to the other. Blaming the victim, rather than seeing the way we contribute to victimization is a sin it is hard to overcome.

When the church is truly the Church, won't it be open and welcoming? Won't it be inclusive in its membership and leadership? Won't it be overpowering advocates against oppression anywhere? Won't it be much different from what it is today?

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“Welcoming the World to our Doorstep” Pledge

In response to the Gospel call to welcome the stranger and provide justice to the foreigner in our midst, we welcome all persons regardless of their national origin or immigration status.



We pledge ourselves to:

1. Welcome persons to our worship services and/or other gatherings regardless of their immigration status;
2. Provide our ministries to all persons regardless of their immigration status; and
3. Advocate for just, humane, and compassionate treatment of all persons who seek safety and/or economic well-being among us, regardless of their immigration status.

After making this pledge, you are encouraged to put the pledge into action. See <http://www.disciplehomeissions.org/rim/> and click on “Welcome Pledge” for ideas of actions that can be taken.

Name of Congregation, Region, General Ministry, Institution, Organization, etc.:

Address:

Contact Person and Phone Number or E-mail Address:

Date Pledge was agreed to by Congregation, Region, General Ministry, Institution, Organization, etc.:

Please send this form to:

Refugee and Immigration Ministries
Disciples Home Missions
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
P.O. Box 1986
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Your Congregation, Region, General Ministry, Institution or Organization will be added to the list (posted on the Web) of those that have taken the “Welcoming the World to our Doorstep” Pledge.

Additional Resources

The following additional resources may be helpful as you reflect on immigration issues from a faith perspective. Links to all of this material are available on the Internet by visiting <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/RIM> and clicking on "Welcome Pledge."

- *Undocumented Persons: Should we Blame or Welcome them?* – Provides basic information dispelling the myths that many people have about undocumented persons;
- *What does the Bible Say about Refugees and Immigrants?* – Provides lists of many Bible passages that speak to issues of immigration;
- *Worship Materials on Refugee and Immigration Issues* – Contains prayer, litanies, sermon ideas, etc. on both refugee and immigration issues;
- *Understanding U.S. Immigration Categories* (Available in English and Spanish) – Explains the ways that people can and cannot get immigration status in the United States;
- *Asylum, Detention, Deportation, and the Legal Rights of the Undocumented* – Explains what happens to persons who come across the border without documentation or who overstay their temporary visas;
- *Resources for Promoting Refugee and Immigration Ministries in your Congregation* – Contains list of available videos/DVDs/internet games, music, discussion starters, role plays and educational activities for children and youth;
- *History of: Our Immigrant and Anti-Immigrant Nation, Our Immigrant Denomination, and Our Disciples' Refugee and Immigration Ministries Program* – Describes the history of our country that has been both welcoming of immigrants and anti-immigrant; and
- *Advocacy Tips* – Explains how you can become an advocate on immigration issues.

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