

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 six theological and biblical reflections on immigration from four Disciples theologians, a World Council of Churches gathering, and the director of RIM. 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”
- Jennifer Riggs – “Six Biblical Themes on Immigration”

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 two or three of the six theological/biblical reflections before each gathering so they are prepared to discuss them. Alternatively, have six groups 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. 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/>
 8. 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 six theological/biblical 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 <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/pages/RIM> and clicking on “Theological Reflection on Immigration & 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; and
- Links to other Web sites with reflections on immigration.

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 the WCC Gathering

Many questions are interspersed throughout this reflection. They should be sufficient for carrying forward the WCC 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.

Reflection from Jennifer Riggs

- Can you think of other biblical themes related to immigration?
- What other passages from the Bible would you lift up regarding sojourners?
- Can you share any personal experiences you have had of being a pilgrim in today's world?
- Do you think biblical hospitality is practiced today? If so, where and when?
- Do you know any experiences of persons who have offered hospitality being blessed (or welcoming angels) in the process?
- How do you think we can partner with God today to meet human need?
- How do you think we can change systems today so people don't have to be in need?
- What is your perspective on the issue of the authority of governments and the authority of God?
- Have you ever experienced fear of a stranger?
- What does it mean to live life with a sense of abundance in today's world?
- Do you believe that we are one with all Christians?
- Do you believe that we are one with all people on earth?

The Decision

Once you have completed your reflection and discussions of the theological/biblical 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 <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/pages/RIM> and clicking on "Theological Reflection on Immigration & 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 for your own members so they can become 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/pages/RIM-WhatsNew>.
- Advocate for just, humane, and compassionate immigration legislation – sign up for the Refugee and Immigration Ministries' "Rapid Response" action alerts and for the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program's "Speak Out" action alerts. You will be sent an email when your voice can make a difference. Sign up for Rapid Response at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/pages/RIM-Advocacy> and for "Speak Out" at http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/PageServer?pagename=how_adv_main
- 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.