

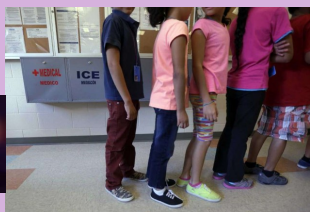


Reflections for 5 Advent Candles

Highlighting Longings of Refugees and Immigrants in the U.S.

All families crave comfort and calm in the season of Christmas. Yet for many of America’s immigrants and refugees, fears and yearnings to belong continue to grow amid the noise of negative rhetoric and potentially restrictive immigration and refugee policies ahead. The prophet Isaiah likewise lived in an era of building tension and peril in 740 B.C. With Israel and Judah facing both external threats of invaders and internal confusions and weak faith, God’s people likewise yearned to belong. In the midst of deep anxieties, Isaiah’s prophetic voice called his community to give witness to God’s power, to believe that their yearnings could be fulfilled in the coming sign of God’s presence through the birth of Emmanuel (God-with-us), and to have courage to act and live in hope.

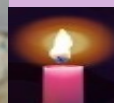
Week #1



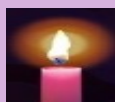
Week #5



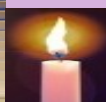
Week #2



Week #4



Week #3



In the weeks before Christmas, we invite you to light candles on an Advent Wreath and reflect on the prophet Isaiah’s words and these “Yearnings to Belong” faced by refugees and immigrants:

Candle #1/Week 1: Yearning for Freedom, Ending Family Detention

Candle #2/Week 2: Yearning for Reform, Improving Immigration Laws

Candle #3/Week 3: Yearning for Protection, Welcoming Refugees

Candle #4/Week 4: Yearning for Family, Stopping Deportations

Candle #5/Christmas Eve: Yearning for Home: Celebrating Solidarity



Developed by Interfaith Immigration Coalition members Sharon Stanley-Rea, Ann Scholz, Marie Lucey, and Paola Marquez. For questions about this resource, contact Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, sstanley@dhm.disciples.org, 202-957-7826.



“Yearnings to Belong”

Candle #1: Yearning for Freedom, Ending Family Detention

Scripture: **Isaiah 2:2,4,11** “In days to come...the nations...will beat their swords into plowshares....A day is coming when human pride will be ended and human arrogance destroyed.”

Lighting the Candle

Reflection: In the midst of threats and rebellion experienced against and among God’s people, the prophet’s vision of world peace must have felt unattainable; perhaps absolutely ludicrous. Yet Isaiah’s vision of world peace is found likewise in Micah 2:2-5; and some scholars think the words may even have been first crafted while the prophet was still in exile. How could hope grow even in the throes of great anxieties? For many immigrant families, including those moms and kids in family detention, the hope of another way of life to come makes all the difference. Isaiah helped his community imagine God in the present by reassuring those suffering that a time of peace beyond pride and torture was God’s clear desire, and that God intends to change hearts to build compassion for others and community beyond conflict.



Eric Gay, STF/AP

Story: Since 2014, children and mothers who escaped horrific gang violence in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to find protection in the United States have instead been held in several detention centers--including the 830-bed Karnes County Residential Center in Karnes City, Texas. Yet although they reported that “we came here seeking refuge,” they nonetheless said in their own words months ago that their children instead “have suffered psychological damage, and many of them have suffered health wise, because of... confinement, and not to mention...abuse and poor treatment.” Some mothers have responded with hunger strikes and courageous efforts to seek to close the centers. But just days ago, officials with the private prison contractor who is paid to run the center at Karnes have banned children from using crayons and markers in a waiting area where children play while they meet with pro-bono lawyers. Particularly during the Christmas season so filled with crafts, coloring and toys, this ban on crayons and new rules that limit the use of toys in some areas undergird again the negative impacts of detention on children and families.

Actions/Resources: As you share toys with children you love this Christmas, remember the children who are held in harsh conditions of family detention. Go to: <http://iirs.org/hopefortheholidays/> to learn how you and your friends and family can write Christmas cards to children in detention (with Spanish phrases provided), and can purchase gifts for children, support a holiday meal, and sign a petition to end the practice of family detention once and for all! Also, go to www.aila.org to read more testimonies from mothers in detention, as compiled by the American Immigration Lawyers Association in their report, “[Families Detained for Months on End Plead for Their Freedom.](#)”

Prayer: God, as we prepare to celebrate the peace and hope brought into the world through your birth, may we be builders of humility and peace by opening our hearts to migrants seeking protection among us. Strengthen our efforts to end family detention, and to offer humane solutions to suffering families. Amen.



“Yearnings to Belong”

Candle #2: Yearning for Reform, Improving Immigration Laws

Scripture: **Isaiah 11:4:** “. . . God shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land’s afflicted.” **Romans 15:8:** “Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.”

Lighting the Candle

Reflection: The times of the prophet Isaiah were yearning times—yearning for the Messiah to bring justice for the people who were poor and oppressed, for a new day of freedom, peace, and justice. Isaiah held out hope to the people. Jesus Christ was born, lived, preached, suffered for us and with us, and died and rose from the dead. Still, human arrogance, greed, injustice, and lack of compassion have their day. Advent 2016 is such a day, when the President-elect proclaims he will build a wall, deport 3 million immigrants, and close our country to Muslims. We had taken hopeful steps toward immigration reform with a path to citizenship. Now that goal has receded into the distance. It is not enough to pray for immigration reform and rely on God to make things right. Paul reminds us we must “welcome one another.” Welcome can involve urging legislators to oppose anti-immigrant bills, and flooding the White House with calls to protect DACA recipients. Welcome may mean to literally open our doors to offer sanctuary to those threatened with deportation. May our yearning be transformed into action for and with sisters and brothers who aspire to citizenship but live in fear of deportation.



Story: Diana Chacon is a DACA recipient whose [story](#) was told on PBS NewsHour, November 18, 2016. Twenty-one-year old Diana was born in Lima, Peru and brought to the U.S. as a child. She is now a student at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. As a DACA recipient she is now fearful of being deported. “DACA changed my life,” Diana said. “It allowed me to be involved in school more, spend more time doing my class work assignments, spend more time applying for programs, and just get involved in my community in general. I stopped making excuses for who I was and what position I was in. I was so encouraged to keep going. I was encouraged to pursue law school. I knew that all the things I have been doing to this point were projecting me into a better future, into a better life. And all of that’s going to change because, you know, now Donald Trump is president.”

Actions/Resources: Respond to action alerts to support DACA persons and other immigrants as sent by faith leaders and posted on www.interfaithimmigration.org. Learn about the Sanctuary Movement and bring it for consideration to your respective faith group or place of worship: www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org and other resources on the Interfaith Immigration website. View a Dreamers website, www.unitedwedream.org.

Prayer: O God, remembrance of your birth into the human family brings light into the darkness of this Advent. We call on you to give strength, comfort, and hope to Dreamers and all immigrants who are fearful of separation and deportation. Enlighten legislators to open a way toward immigration reform. Embolden us to stand with and speak out on behalf of immigrant sisters and brothers, and to consider opening our doors to offer Sanctuary if needed. Amen.



“Yearnings to Belong”

Candle #3: Yearning for Protection, Welcoming Refugees

Scripture: Isaiah 35:3-4, 8-10: “Give strength to hands that are tired and to knees that tremble with weakness. Tell everyone who is discouraged, ‘Be strong and don’t be afraid! God is coming to your rescue.’”

Lighting the Candle

Reflection: A center point of God’s loving commitment was the escape God offered his suffering people during the time of the Exodus. Now centuries later, a new promise of liberation was voiced by Isaiah to communities who had been pushed from their homeland of Zion into exile in Babylon. Exhausted prisoners are promised strong hands and knees! The helpless in confinement, and ones weary from missing their homeland, are offered courage that a way beyond fears is coming soon through the power of God! In our world where an unprecedented 1 of every 113 people is a refugee, displaced person, or asylee, Isaiah’s vision provides encouragement for struggles families must face every day. May it likewise embolden all God’s people to offer welcome, arms of compassion, and the hope of a new home to exhausted refugees.



Desert News Utah

Story: In 2011, the father of 9 year old Daho and his four siblings was taken as political prisoner in Ethiopia, and has never been seen again. The next year, the children’s mother was likewise kidnapped, beaten, and jailed as a political prisoner. For five years, the children knew nothing of their mother’s condition, but managed to stay together with each other. Their mother prayed constantly that tomorrow would be the day she would finally see them again. Last year, the children were brought through a refugee foster care program to Utah. Not long later, they learned their mother had been released from jail, and was in a Kenyan refugee camp. Then in late September, the family was reunited against all odds in West Valley City, Utah. Now in their new apartment, 14 year old daughter Sorate says, “We all squish together. For me, that’s the best part.” Read more [here](#).

Actions/Resources: Last year, dozens of national and state level anti-refugee bills emerged, and faith partners played key roles in defeating most of them. Now is a critical time to build or renew relationships with community, state, and national leaders, and to encourage [local welcoming statements](#). Use this [alert](#) to call leaders NOW, and to find state by state [alerts](#), as well. Reach out across faith lines to build an inter-faith team of partners, including refugee voices, to visit your legislators and voice your support for refugees! Find information to help you prepare [here](#) and see a full toolkit of resources from [refugeesarewelcome.org](#) [here](#). Also, contact Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries (see below) and the [refugee resettlement agency](#) nearest you to resettle refugees. Consider holding a [“Refugees Welcome Dinner” or worship](#) to build friendships with refugees who are seeking new life and hope in your area! Register your welcome event [here](#), and then please write to ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org to share event stories and pictures!!

Prayer: Creator God who has been present in the world since first light, we pray you will be present with refugees and migrants through every step of their journeys. And, may our own journeys of faith include daring to take steps to relate to and welcome refugees who have suffered so deeply. Amen.

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“Yearnings to Belong”

Candle #4: Yearning for Family, Stopping Deportations

Scripture: Isaiah 7:14-16 *“The Lord himself will give you a sign: a young woman shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel. By the time he is old enough to make his own decisions, people will be drinking milk and eating honey. Even before that time comes, the lands of those two kings who terrify you will be deserted.”*

Lighting the Candle



Reflection: We light this candle with all those who yearn to be with family and friends this advent season. We stand with those who wait for a mother or father, sister or brother, son or daughter to return. We pray with all those families separated by borders and boundaries. We ask forgiveness for our own complicity in an immigration system that too often serves to thwart God’s desire to dwell with us in the heart of our families. And we remember that young Nazorean woman whose faith and courage gave birth to the promise that our families and communities will once again be made whole.

Story: Evelyn’s parents brought her to the United States when she was only three years old in order to provide a better life for their children. They hoped for a life free of drugs and violence, where their girls would have access to quality education and a chance for the American Dream. For many years Evelyn did not know about her family’s immigration status. Then during her senior year in high school, her mother was arrested for driving without a license. She was sent to a detention center where she was held for more than four months and eventually deported back to Colombia.

For years Evelyn longed to see and hug her mom. During those years her mom missed high school and university graduations, birthdays, holidays, and weddings. Life has been difficult. The girls grew up too quickly. Their grades suffered. There were financial strains. They had to move to a smaller apartment in Orlando, Florida, and Evelyn put off enrolling in college. Despite it all Evelyn finds strength in her love of family and in her commitment to faith. How long must this family wait to be made whole again?

Actions/Resources: Join the movement to support immigrant rights and family unity! [Not One More Deportation](#) is a campaign made up of individuals, organizations, artists, and allies to expose, confront, and overcome unjust immigration laws. Support United We Dream’s [Deportation Defense Program](#). It connects, trains, and empowers local communities to defend their rights, stop unjust deportations, and combat the ongoing collaboration between local police and immigration authorities.

Prayer: God who is mother and father to us all, we pray for immigrant families that yearn to share again the joy of each other’s presence and to feel once more the warmth of each other’s embrace. Make our families whole again. We pray for renewed energy and courage for all who work to ensure that families everywhere can celebrate together the miracle of Emmanuel—God is with us! Amen.



Candle #5/Christmas Eve: Yearning for Home, Celebrating Solidarity

Lighting the Candle

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-6 *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone....For a child is born...His dominion is vast and..peaceful.”*

Reflection: On a cold night in the hills of Bethlehem a young couple on the move shelter from the cold in a place where animals dwell. There they labor alone to give birth to the promised one, the Word of God who is the light that dispels all darkness. Do you know the God born like us who is eternal love? Have you seen the Word made flesh? Have you met the Word of God who walks amongst us still in the guise of the refugee yearning for freedom, the migrant yearning for home? We pray for the grace to hear the cry of God’s people. We pray for the courage to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, clothe the needy, and shelter those yearning for home this Christmas season.

Story: Rosa Robles Loreto has made her home in Tucson since 1999. She’s been a faithful parishioner of Santa Monica Church and a valued member of her community. Rosa volunteered at her sons’ school and worked hard to help her husband support their family. Rosa paid her taxes and had no criminal record. In the summer of 2014 Rosa’s life was turned upside down. She was involved in a routine traffic stop. She was not ticketed, but she was handed over to border patrol and threatened with deportation.



Like millions of other undocumented immigrants in the United States, Rosa's case is considered low-priority for ICE. She has no criminal history. She’s a caretaker for minors and has long-standing community ties. Despite all of that Rosa was placed in detention for 53 days; fought her immigration case through the courts; and was ultimately ordered deported. Moved by Rosa’s strength and determination to keep her family together, [Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson](#) offered her sanctuary. It was openness to the cry of God’s people that moved Southside Presbyterian to open their hearts to Rosa, to shelter her in their sanctuary, and to surround her family with love. On Nov.11, 2015, after 461 days of living in sanctuary, Rosa returned to her home and family no longer fearing the separation of deportation.

Actions/Resources: As people of faith we are called to stand in solidarity with our community members, congregants, and neighbors as they face the very real possibility of deportation. By offering safety and shelter we can help to keep families together. Go to: <https://auburnseminary.org/4-ways-your-faith-community-can-prepare-for-sanctuary/> for a new compilation of resources, and also [Sign the Pledge For Sanctuary](#). Find more information at [Sanctuarynotdeportation.org](#). Help create protection networks to provide know your rights education, sanctuary space, legal assistance, housing assistance, family planning, a bail support fund, and to share [resources](#).

Prayer: Incarnate Word of God, who loved us so much that you came to live among us, give us light to see you present still in all of your creation. Give us grace to hear your cry in all who are in need. Give us hearts to embrace you as we welcome the stranger home. Amen.

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